

CLEMENTINE ROSE

and the Best News Yet



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Jacqueline
Harvey

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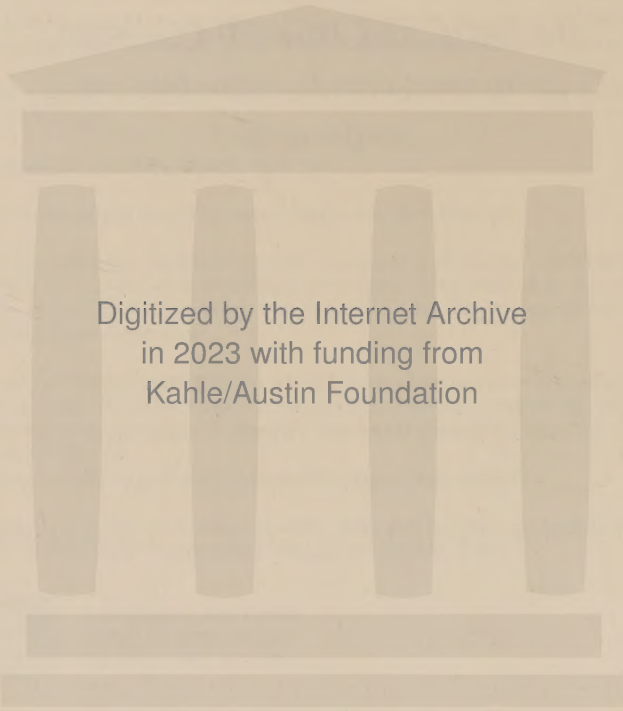
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*For Ian and everyone who has helped
bring Clementine Rose to life over
the years, and especially for Eden,
who most closely resembles my
gorgeous girl*



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WELCOME HOME!

Clementine Rose plonked down on the top step. Aunt Violet and Uncle Digby were late. Clarissa had said that they would be home soon, but that was ages ago. Since then, Clementine had had time to practice her skipping, play soccer with Lavender and rehearse all her ballet positions.

She couldn't wait for the pair to arrive. With her mother's help, Clementine had made a special sponge cake filled with jam

and cream then decorated it with fresh strawberries, although a couple had dropped on the floor, so it was lucky Lavender was there to hoover them up before anyone noticed.

Clementine and Will had also painted a big 'Welcome Home' sign, which Drew helped them hang in the kitchen the previous evening. But now Will and Drew weren't even there because Drew had to go to the city and Will had gone along for the ride.

Clementine yawned and rested her chin in her hands.

Aunt Violet and Uncle Digby had been away for two whole weeks on a holiday to the seaside. Clarissa and Drew had encouraged the pair to take a well-deserved break, since they would need to take over more of the day-to-day running of the hotel once the baby arrived. Clementine couldn't wait to meet her new brother or sister. She was going to teach them *everything*, so they could play together right from the start.

Clementine was happy that her family was growing again. She'd already gained a father and a brother in Drew and Will, and then a grandmother when she learned that Aunt Violet's daughter, Eliza, was her birth mother. Eliza had been very sick and, when she knew she wouldn't recover, had sent the newborn Clementine to her cousin Clarissa, asking her to take care of the child as if she were her own. Clementine was sad she would never know Eliza, but she felt lucky to have had two mummies who both loved her more than anything.

Clementine grinned, thinking about the last time she'd gone on holidays to the beach with Uncle Digby and Aunt Violet. The pair had been so mean to each other. Aunt Violet had said horrible things about Uncle Digby's knobbly knees, and Uncle Digby had said Aunt Violet's hat was so big it looked like a flying saucer had landed on her head. But now they were in love and everything had changed. Clementine hoped they might

even get married one day. Except that her grandmother had told her she was too old for all that nonsense and she couldn't imagine getting married for the fourth time when Clementine had offered to be a flower girl.

Uncle Digby had looked so sad when Clementine told him what her grandmother had said, the morning they left for their holiday.

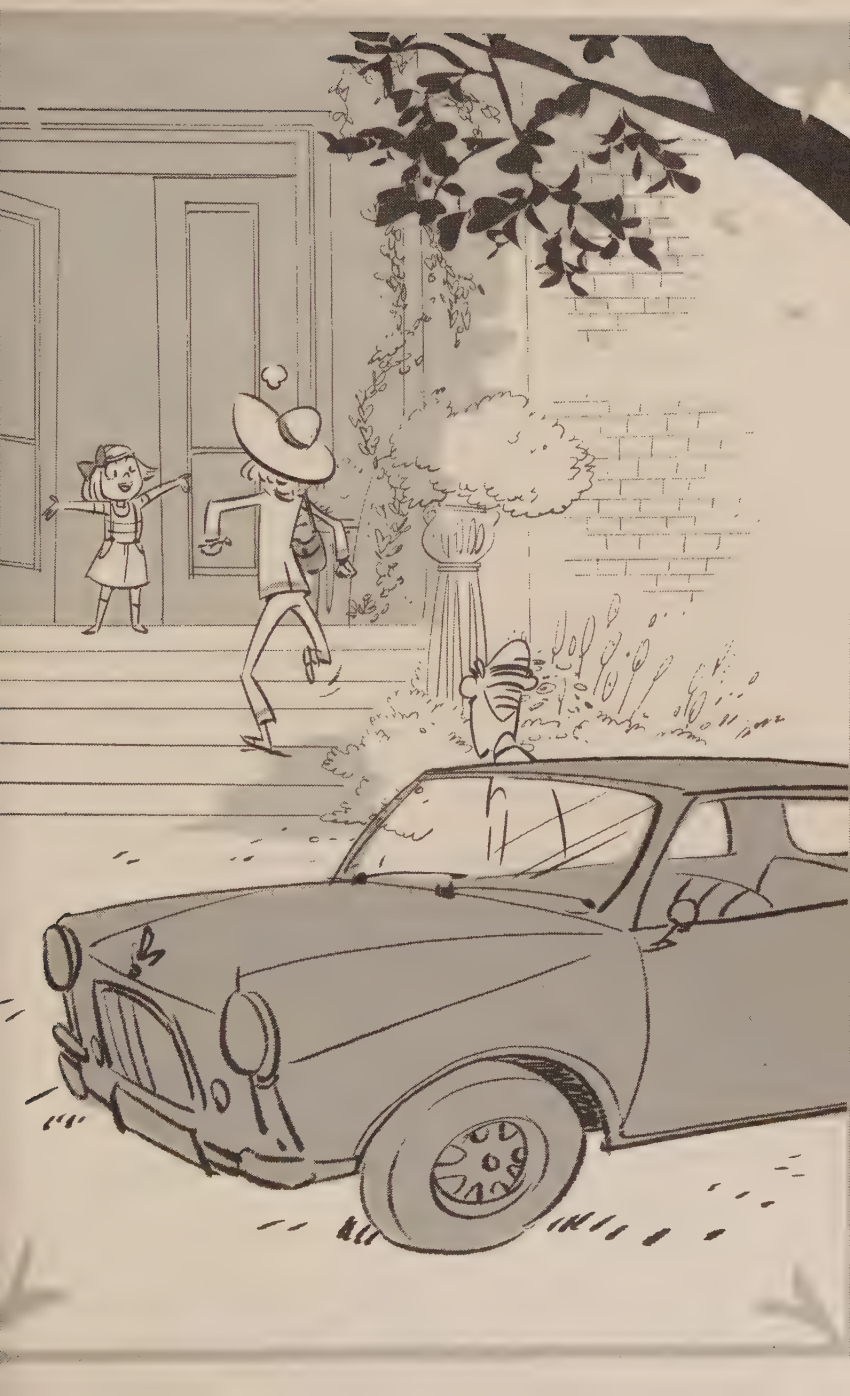
Clementine called out for Lavender to stop digging up the rose garden just as Aunt Violet's shiny red car turned into the driveway. It sped around the circle and came to a screeching halt in front of the house.

'Granny, Uncle Digby!' Clementine leapt up, waving her arms. She ran down the steps towards them.

Violet Appleby stepped out of the driver's seat, a look of thunder on her face.

'You can get the bags!' she hissed and slammed the door so hard that the window rattled.

Clementine recoiled.



Uncle Digby unfurled his legs and levered himself out of the car.

'Welcome home Gra . . . ' Clementine began, poised to give Aunt Violet a hug, but the woman stormed past her.

'Not now, Clementine!' she blurted, pushing her way through the front door. Clementine thought it sounded like Aunt Violet was crying. Her own lip began to tremble. This wasn't how she imagined welcoming the pair home.

'Hello, sweetheart,' Digby Pertwhistle held out his arms and Clementine ran to him. Despite her size, he picked her up and balanced her on his hip.

'Did I do something?' Clementine could feel the tears welling. She brushed them away.

'I'm afraid that was me,' Digby replied with a grimace.

Clementine blinked, the tears sticking like dewdrops to her long eyelashes. 'What was it?'

'That's the problem.' Digby shrugged. 'I have no idea.'

Clementine's brow wrinkled. 'Well, that's silly. Have you asked her?'

Digby nodded. 'She won't tell me, and while I have a variety of skills, mind reading isn't one of them.'

Clementine sniffed. 'Maybe she'll be in a better mood after she sees the cake Mummy and I made.'

Digby Pertwhistle nodded. 'Let's hope so.'



FEUD

Drew leaned across the stove to his wife. 'I thought a couple of weeks' holiday would leave them glowing, not feuding,' he whispered.

Clarissa frowned as she stirred the gravy. 'Aunt Violet went straight upstairs to her room. I knocked and offered her a cup of tea, but she sent me away. Uncle Digby hasn't said much, either.' She snuck a sideways glance at the man, who was reading the newspaper at the kitchen table.

Clementine emerged from the pantry with a box of Pharaoh's cat biscuits. The scrawny sphynx stretched in his basket before padding over to inspect his dinner. Clementine gave him a tickle under the chin and shooed Lavender back to her own bowl. She was known for eating Pharaoh's meals as well as her own if no one was watching.

Will was sitting with Uncle Digby, flicking through a comic book.

Clementine climbed up onto the chair beside her step brother. She looked at Uncle Digby, her brows furrowed.

'Holidays are supposed to make people happy,' Clementine said. She tapped her forefinger against her lip. 'Unless you get sunburnt or bitten by bugs.'

'Or your ice cream melts all over your hand,' Will added, joining the conversation. 'Or a seagull steals your chips or you get sand in your swimmers and it goes up your b—'

'Will!' Drew chided.

Clementine and Will giggled.

Digby Pertwhistle grinned. 'I *am* happy,' he said. 'I had a wonderful time, and I thought your grandmother did too – until we were heading home.'

'Is there anything you remember doing that might have upset her?' Clementine said. 'Did you spill something on her clothes, or use her lipstick or accidentally spray too much perfume until the bottle was empty?'

Digby Pertwhistle chuckled. 'No, none of those things.'

Clementine frowned. She was trying to think of anything else she'd done over the years that had caused Aunt Violet to be cross with her. 'What about talking too loudly, or eating with your mouth open – or trying on her clothes?'

Digby shook his head. 'Not that I remember.'

'Uncle Digby doesn't wear girls' clothes, Clemmie.' Will laughed.

Clementine was stumped.

Drew walked to the table and set plates down in front of the children.

‘Are we expecting Aunt Violet?’ he asked. The thud of feet on the stairs answered his question.

‘Something smells delicious, Clarissa, though you shouldn’t have gone to so much trouble,’ the woman said, overly cheerful. ‘I’d have been happy with a cheese sandwich after everything I’ve eaten in the past couple of weeks.’

Clementine didn’t think that was true. Her grandmother always complained when they had cheese toasties instead of proper dinners, but at least she seemed to be in a much happier mood.

‘Don’t I get a cuddle?’ Aunt Violet asked, looking at Clementine and Will before spotting the banner strung across the wall. ‘Oh, that’s a beautiful sign – it’s so nice to be appreciated.’ She cast a glare towards Uncle Digby.

Clementine hopped down from her chair and scurried into the woman’s outstretched arms. Will didn’t move until his father pointedly raised his eyebrows.

'Welcome home, Aunt Violet,' he mumbled, as she hugged him against her flat tummy.

'I missed you all so much,' the woman said. 'It's hard being separated from your loved ones.'

Clementine thought that was a strange thing to say, since Aunt Violet had been with Uncle Digby, and he loved her more than anyone.

Clarissa placed the last of the plates on the table and everyone sat down. Aunt Violet turning her back slightly to Uncle Digby. Clementine frowned. If she had done that to Will, her grandmother would have told her off for being rude.

'Did you enjoy your holiday?' Drew asked.

For a moment there was a stony silence. Uncle Digby looked at Aunt Violet, who seemed to be suddenly interested in the ceiling.

'It was wonderful,' the butler finally replied.

Clarissa stared at her aunt, hoping to extract a response from the woman.

'It was fine,' Aunt Violet said.

Clementine watched her mother exchange a glance with Drew. Clearly something had gone horribly wrong while they were away.

The conversation stopped, replaced by a worrying quiet filled only by the sounds of cutlery chinking on the china plates.

At long last, Uncle Digby cleared his throat. 'You wouldn't believe who we ran into. Do you remember Mrs Dent from the Endersley-on-Sea guest house?'

'Of course.' Clarissa smiled. 'She was lovely, and such a good hostess. Remember, Clemmie, you and Freddy had that adventure with Lavender in the cave.'

Clementine nodded.

'I didn't think you were going there on your trip,' Clarissa said.

'Neither did I,' Aunt Violet's lip curled.

'We had some car trouble,' Uncle Digby said. 'So Mrs Dent kindly took us in for a night until the mechanic could fix things.'

‘That’s what happened last time, but we took your car then, Uncle Digby, and we had to get a tow truck,’ Clementine said, her eyes wide. ‘That’s ’ronic – two times to the seaside and two broken cars.’

Clarissa and Drew chuckled. ‘I think the word you’re looking for is i-ronic, Clemmie – which is a very big word for someone your age. Where have you heard that used?’ Drew asked the girl.

Clementine thought about it. ‘It was Mrs Bottomley. She said it’s i-ronic that Granny and Uncle Digby used to hate each other and now they’re in love.’

Uncle Digby reached across and patted Aunt Violet’s hand, but the woman quickly pulled it away and pretended she needed a tissue. Clementine knew it was pretend because her grandmother didn’t even have a runny nose.

Everyone went back to their dinners. Fortunately, the conversation turned to other things.

‘How long until the baby comes?’ Will asked, his eyes sparkling. He’d told Clarissa the other day that he was excited about his new sibling, but a little worried he wouldn’t know how to hold it properly.

Clarissa looked up at the boy and smiled. ‘Three weeks from tomorrow.’

Clementine’s eyebrows jumped up in alarm. ‘Three weeks – that’s just at the end of the holidays. What if it comes early? That’s even sooner.’

‘We hope not,’ Clarissa said, exchanging a curious look with Drew. ‘We’ve still got to finish the nursery, and Drew is away working for the next week and we have guests booked in. The doctor says everything is going as expected – there’s no reason to think that will happen.’

Clementine wasn’t so sure. There was a new boy in her class called Micah and his little sister had come a month before she was supposed to. Three weeks or less wasn’t much time, and she had a lot of things to get

ready before the baby arrived. She'd written a secret list the afternoon she'd found out she was getting a new brother or sister. The next week, Clementine had talked to all the adults who she thought would be able to help her and everyone had agreed, but now the baby was almost here she needed to collect everything – and soon.

'How are you going with choosing names?' Uncle Digby asked. 'Have you found anything you can both agree on yet?'

Drew and Clarissa shook their heads.

'I think we should leave it up to the children,' Drew said, waving his fork in the air.

Clarissa grimaced. She wasn't keen on that idea – though Clementine and Will thought it was wonderful.

'I like Balthazar,' Will said. 'But only for a boy, of course.'

'Good heavens,' Aunt Violet's lip quivered. 'You might as well call the poor child Shakespeare.'

Clementine giggled.

‘Those are both silly,’ she said. ‘I think we should name the baby Bingo if it’s a boy and Cupcake if it’s a girl.’

‘Perhaps if your mother was giving birth to a puppy or a pig.’ Aunt Violet rolled her eyes.

‘Don’t be silly, Granny,’ Clementine said. ‘I’m going to write a proper list – but I do like Buttercup.’

‘Well, that’s something to look forward to,’ Violet smirked.

‘Who’d like dessert?’ Clarissa asked. ‘I have apple crumble and ice cream.’

There was a chorus of yeses.

Clementine frowned. Although the mood in the kitchen had lifted and Aunt Violet had stopped being quite so obviously awful to Uncle Digby, Clementine noticed that Aunt Violet had scarcely looked at Uncle Digby all night. She would have to do some investigating.



BROKEN

The sun had barely begun to rise when Clementine hopped out of bed. Lavender was still snoring in her basket. Clementine grinned when she realised Pharaoh had snuck in during the night and the pair was cuddled up together – they really were the best of friends, even though Aunt Violet still sniffed at the idea.

Clementine put on her favourite denim overalls and a short sleeved pink blouse, then sat on her bed and slipped her feet into her

white sandshoes. She had jobs to do this morning and she wanted to get on with them.

The girl brushed her hair and pulled it back with a pink bow, then sat down at her desk and checked her notebook. She had four visits to make this morning and, knowing how much Mrs Mogg and Father Bob liked to chat, she could be a while. She didn't want to tell anyone in the family what she was up to either, or that would spoil the surprise.

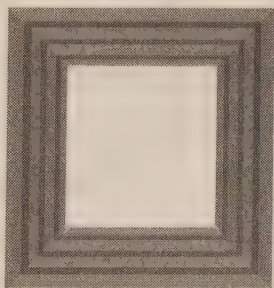
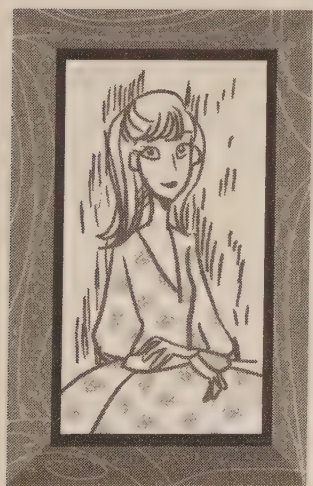
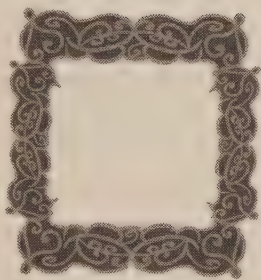
Clementine walked into the hallway and saw Uncle Digby standing outside Aunt Violet's room. He was balancing a tray with a lovely red rose in a bud vase sitting alongside a teapot, cup and saucer and a plate of toast. He knocked gently and opened the door.

'Well, that's a relief,' Clementine said to herself. Uncle Digby had brought Aunt Violet breakfast every morning since they'd realised they were in love. The pair must have made up last night after dinner if Uncle Digby was bringing breakfast now.

Clementine decided to go and say hello to her other grandparents on the wall in the stairwell. She'd been so busy lately that she hadn't been chatting to them as much as usual, and she didn't want them to think she'd forgotten them since discovering Aunt Violet was her real grandmother.

Clementine looked up at the portrait of her grandfather in his uniform. He was so handsome and he had the kindest eyes. Her granny had a smile like a warm hug and was dressed for a ball in the most splendid gown with the family tiara on her head.

'Hello, Granny and Grandpa,' the child said quietly. 'Sorry I have to whisper, but almost everyone else is still asleep. Are you as excited about the baby as I am? There's only three weeks until it arrives, or maybe less, and there's so much to do – I need to collect all my surprises, and think of some more names, and the cot needs to be built and the nursery finished. And when the baby comes I'm going to have to be very responsible so I can help



Mummy and Drew as much as possible. I promise I won't drop him or her, and I won't even mind if they cry a little bit. I'm still not sure about changing nappies though. I hope it doesn't do explosive poos like Micah says his sister does sometimes. That sounds disgusting.'

Clementine could have sworn her grandfather winked at her. She was just about to tell them the names she'd added to her list last night when there was a loud smash and an angry voice.

Clementine jumped into the air and flew up the stairs to find Uncle Digby trying to balance the now broken vase on the tea tray with Aunt Violet's door firmly shut behind him.

'What happened?' Clementine said, startling the man. He spun around, wondering what she was doing out and about so early. 'I thought you made up.'

Digby Pertwhistle cleared his throat. 'Your grandmother isn't feeling well.'

Clementine narrowed her eyes, thinking of how Aunt Violet had pretended to need a

tissue the night before. 'That's not true. She's still mad at you, isn't she?'

Digby pulled a face and nodded.

'And she still won't tell you what the matter is?' Clementine asked.

He shook his head.

'Well, that's annoying,' Clementine said, placing her hands on her hips. 'I'm going to ask her myself.'

Uncle Digby recoiled. 'No Clemmie, this is between me and your grandmother,' the man said.

'Not anymore. I got a terrible fright. I could have fallen down the stairs, and Granny and Grandpa could have fallen off the wall,' Clementine said. And with that the child tapped gently and opened the door.

'Go away!' a muffled voice came from under the covers. 'I don't want to talk to you! I'm too disappointed.'

'It's me, Granny,' Clementine said, and climbed up onto the side of the bed. Aunt Violet rolled over, her eyes puffy and red.

‘Why are you mad with Uncle Digby?’

‘That’s none of your concern,’ the woman said, and pushed herself up against the pillows. ‘*He* knows why.’

Clementine leaned in against her grandmother’s shoulder. ‘He said he has no idea and I believe him.’

‘That’s typical of a man,’ Violet sniffed. ‘Completely unaware of my feelings.’

‘But he loves you,’ Clementine said.

‘Does he really?’ Violet asked. ‘I suspect he’s the same as every other man I’ve ever put my trust in. Monumentally disappointing.’

Clementine had no idea what ‘monumentally’ meant, but it didn’t sound good.

‘I really don’t want to talk about it, Clementine. You mustn’t worry. We’re adults and we’ll sort it out – even if it means that someone has to go,’ Violet said, checking herself in a compact mirror she’d picked up off the bedside table.

Clementine’s tummy twisted. ‘But you

can't go anywhere,' the child said. 'You're my granny.'

'Yes, that's why it won't be me who's leaving,' Violet pursed her lips.

Clementine's blue eyes widened in alarm. 'Uncle Digby can't go anywhere, either. He's . . . he's Uncle Digby.'

'He's the family butler, and he's ancient and he should have retired and moved to the seaside by now,' Violet said. 'Anyway, we're not talking about it, Clemmie. What are you doing up so early, anyway?'

'I've got jobs to do,' the child said quietly. She shuffled to the edge of the bed and hopped down onto the floor.

'Speaking of jobs, I'd better get dressed and go and see Elaine. I'm hosting a parade for her on Tuesday. I need to find out what she wants me to wear,' said Aunt Violet, but Clementine wasn't listening. She had to find out what the problem was, and soon – the mess between her grandmother and Uncle Digby was much worse than she'd first thought.



A TROLLEY FULL OF ...

Clementine finished her jam toast and swept the last of the crumbs to the floor for Lavender.

Drew had already left for his work trip with Basil Hobbs, their friend and neighbour. The pair were filming a documentary about the life of an important historical person (whose name Clementine couldn't remember). Drew would be away for at least a week – maybe more – which gave Clementine a squirly feeling in her tummy. The nursery was *still*

a big mess and they *still* hadn't built the cot yet. There was so much to do, and no one seemed at all worried that the baby might decide it was ready to be born any day now.

Clarissa walked into the kitchen, yawning widely and resting a hand on her bulging belly.

'Good morning, darling,' she said. 'You're up early for a Sunday.'

The child looked at the clock. It was just after eight. 'You're up late, Mummy. You never sleep in this long, except when you had morning sickness, which was really all day sickness.'

Clementine had planned to write her mother a message to tell her where she was going, albeit in a roundabout sort of way. She had hoped to get moving before anyone else was up, but it seemed her luck had run out.

'The doctor advised that I try and bank some sleep before the baby comes,' Clarissa replied, and yawned again. 'Drew brought me a cup of tea before he left, but then I dozed

off. You know, life won't be the same after this little one arrives.'

'It will be even better,' Clementine said, with a firm nod. Though she wondered if she should try to get in some extra naps, just in case.

Clarissa grinned at her daughter. 'I hope this baby makes me smile as much as you do, sweetheart.'

Clementine nodded again. 'It will – except when it has a stinky nappy. I have to go out for a while,' she informed her mother, who had now sat down with a fresh cup of tea.

Clarissa gave her daughter a curious look. 'And where, pray tell, are you off to?'

'The village,' Clementine said mysteriously, raising her eyebrows high on her forehead.

Clarissa chuckled. 'Do you want to wait for Will to go with you?'

Clementine shook her head. 'Will's going to Jules' this morning, remember, Mummy?' Besides, she wanted to do her collecting all on her own.

Clarissa scratched her nose and sighed. 'Of course. Odette and Sophie are away, aren't they? I'd forgotten you've started holidays.'

'Do babies always make their mothers forget so many things?' Clementine asked.

'Always,' Aunt Violet said as she trotted down the stairs and swept into the room. 'Would you like me to take Will to Highton Mill? I have to see Elaine this morning. I'm meeting her at the shop just after nine.'

'That would save Pierre a drive,' Clarissa said. She stood up and walked to the telephone and quickly called the man, who was very grateful for the offer. He was currently juggling the bakery and looking after Jules on his own, and strangely wasn't making a delivery to the Moggs' shop this morning, either. She sat back down at the table. 'Have you seen Uncle Digby?'

Aunt Violet shook her head, avoiding Clementine's gaze as the child looked up in surprise.

‘That’s not true, Granny,’ Clementine said. ‘Uncle Digby took you tea and toast – but you threw him out and broke the vase.’

‘That was *not* my fault,’ the woman said crisply. ‘And I have no idea where he is now.’

Clarissa frowned. Uncle Digby’s bedroom door had been wide open when she’d come downstairs, and there wasn’t any sign of him. He’d usually be pottering about in the kitchen, but perhaps after the upset he’d decided to do jobs elsewhere in the house instead.

‘I’ll go and find him after breakfast,’ Clarissa said. The tension between Uncle Digby and Aunt Violet was beginning to worry her.

Clementine’s tummy felt sick. What if Aunt Violet had already told Uncle Digby to leave? That would be the worst news ever.



Clementine snapped Lavender’s red lead onto her collar and set off toward the village. Pulling her little red wagon behind her, with

Lavender tripping along out front, the child marched determinedly. She would make her four visits while her mother found Uncle Digby, and then when she returned home she would do her very best to convince him that Penberthy House was exactly where he belonged.

The pair walked across the field and through the gate into the rectory garden, beside the church. Clementine parked her wagon by the roses and was about to knock on Father Bob's back door when it burst open and the man dashed out, almost bowling the girl over.

'Ohh!' He jumped and the pile of white cards he was holding flew into the air, landing like giant lumps of confetti all around them. 'Clemmie, what are you doing here?' he said, scurrying about to retrieve the scattered notes.

'Sorry,' she said with a grimace. 'I didn't mean to scare you. I just came to get the thing you were making for me.'

Father Bob stood up, a blank look on his face. 'I'm sorry, Clemmie, but I'm in a bit of a rush.'

'But I've brought my trolley so I can take it home and put it somewhere safe,' Clementine said.

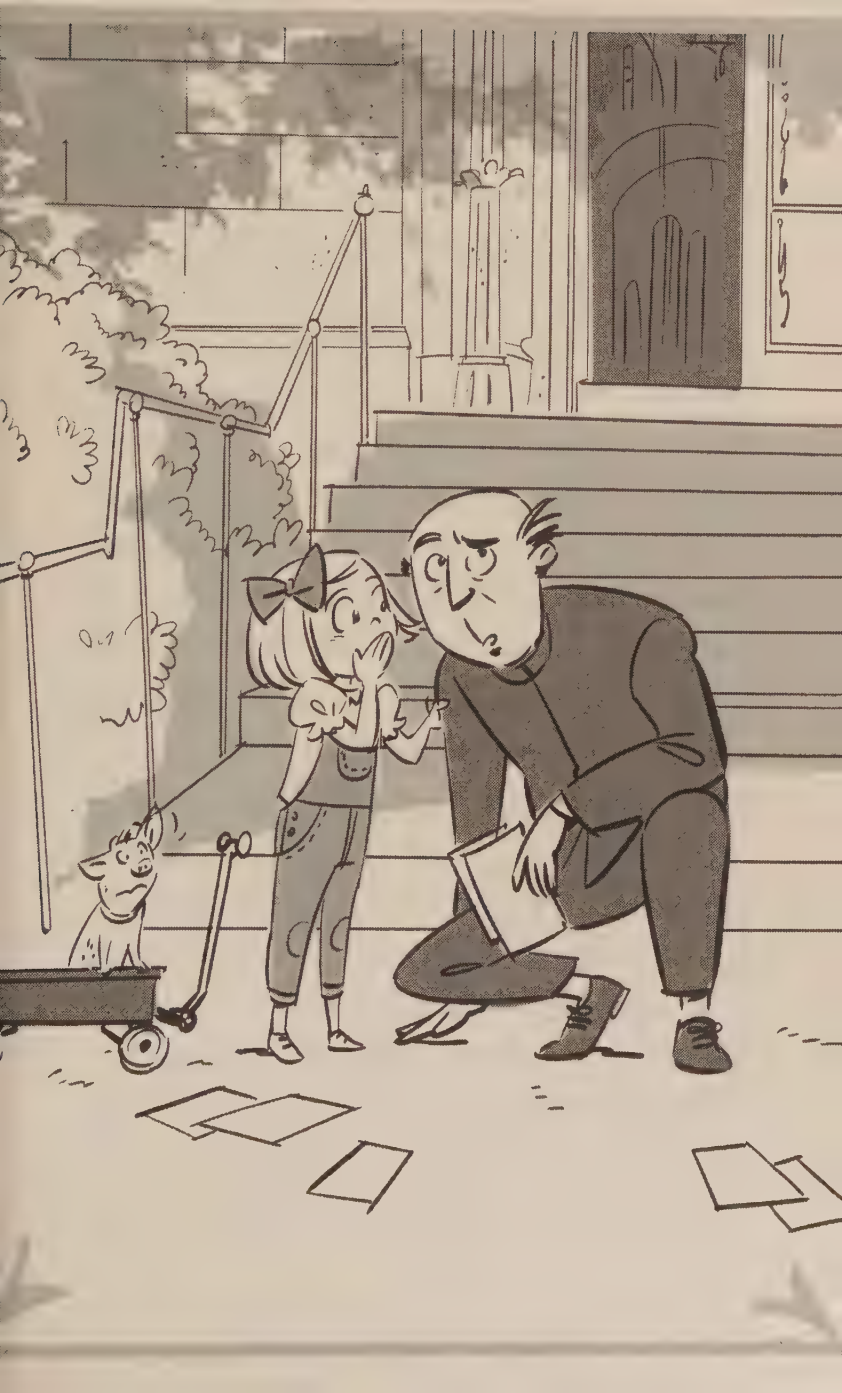
Father Bob's forehead creased with wrinkles. 'What thing?' he asked.

Clementine pulled on his arm to bring him down to her level then cupped her hand and whispered in his ear.

'Remember?' she said.

The man still looked confused – as much about why Clementine needed to whisper in an empty garden as to the rest of it. He thought for a moment more then stood up straight. 'Oh, yes,' he gasped, his left hand flying to his mouth. 'I do remember that now.'

Clementine nodded. 'I asked you just after Mummy told us about the baby, and you said you could do it, but then whenever I've seen you I've always been with Mummy,



or Drew, or Granny or Uncle Digby and I want everyone to get a surprise – that's why I didn't remind you.'

Father Bob sighed. 'Oh dear, I am sorry, Clemmie. When is the baby due again?'

'Three weeks,' Clementine replied, trying to ignore the fact that Lavender was munching one of Father Bob's flowers. 'But Micah's sister came early, so my baby might too.'

'Do you really think it would matter if the baby didn't have it for a little while?' he asked.

Clementine could feel tears brimming in her eyes. She brushed them away. 'But I wanted everything to be perfect.'

'Of course you do, sweetheart,' Father Bob said kindly. 'I'll get to work on it this afternoon. But I have a sermon to deliver first.'

Clementine stepped back so she could see the man properly. 'Oops,' she said. Father Bob was wearing his black robes and white collar, and the cards she'd sent flying were covered in his notes for the morning's service.

‘Would you and Lavender like to join us?’ he asked.

Clementine shook her head. ‘Not today, thank you. I have to go and see the Moggs, and Mrs Tribble and Ana, and get home in time to stop Granny from getting rid of Uncle Digby.’

The man looked at her, intrigued, but there wasn’t time to figure out what she meant. ‘Don’t you worry, Clemmie. I’ll get it done,’ the man said, and with that he rushed down the path to the church just as the first parishioners were beginning to arrive.

Clementine picked up Lavender’s lead and let out a sigh that seemed to come up all the way from her sandshoes. ‘I hope everyone else is better at remembering,’ she said to the little pig. ‘Or else we’re in big trouble.’

But when Clementine and Lavender arrived at the Moggs’ shop they found a ‘closed’ sign on the door and Claws, the Mogg’s old tabby cat, sunning himself on the bench out the front. Lavender gave the grumpy feline a

wide berth. Clementine bit her lip. The shop was never closed, except when Mr Mogg had had to go to hospital. She walked down the driveway at the side but the place was locked up tight. Surely there was nothing wrong – with the Moggs or with her present.

At least she knew that Mrs Tribble remembered, because she had given Clementine a wink and said that she was almost finished when the child had seen her last week at the school assembly.

Clementine walked around the corner to the Tribbles' blue cottage, knocked on the door and waited, but no one came.

Mrs Lim, the Tribbles' neighbour, popped her head up over the hedge. 'Hello, Clementine,' the old woman said brightly. 'If you're looking for Joshua, the Tribbles left yesterday afternoon for a short break in the city. I think they're due back on Wednesday.'

Clementine pressed her hands dramatically to the top of her head. 'Today is a disaster,' she declared.

‘Never mind,’ Mrs Lim said. ‘I’m sure Joshua would love to play with you when he gets back.’

That was the last thing Clementine planned to do, especially after the boy had put a fly in her drink bottle at sport last week.

Clementine said goodbye to the woman and set off again. She had one more stop before she went home. Hopefully Ana Hobbs had organised the baby-sized ballet shoes and tutu like she’d promised.



BANKING

Later that afternoon, Violet Appleby poked her head around Clementine's bedroom door and was surprised to see the child lying under the covers, a pink sleeping mask hiding her eyes. Given the girl was tossing and turning and grumbling to herself, it was clear that she wasn't asleep.

'What are you doing in bed in the middle of the afternoon?' the old woman asked. 'Are you ill?'

Clementine pushed the eye mask to the top of her head and sat up.

'No,' she sighed. 'I'm banking, except it's not working because there's too much noise inside my head. I've tried counting sheep and telling myself a boring story like the ones Mrs Bottomley always goes on and on about, but I'm wide awake. And Lavender can't sleep, either.'

The little pig grunted as if to agree.

'Banking?' Violet asked. 'What on earth do you mean?'

'Mummy said that Dr Everingham told her to try banking sleep, because after the baby comes she won't be getting any. So, I thought I would try it as well, in case the baby keeps the whole house awake,' Clementine said, noticing her grandmother's beautiful outfit. The woman was dressed in a red pants suit with a pearl choker at her neck. She'd not long arrived back from Highton Mill.

'Let's hope that the baby is a good sleeper, otherwise it might not just be Pertwhistle

who leaves home,' Violet muttered under her breath.

Clementine looked at her in alarm. 'What do you mean? Didn't you and Uncle Digby make up?'

She'd assumed that her grandmother and Uncle Digby had sorted things out because the man had been vacuuming downstairs when she'd returned from her ill-fated mission. He was whistling too, and Uncle Digby always whistled when he was happy.

Clementine had discovered that the Hobbses – minus Basil – were visiting Ana's parents and no one was sure when they were due back. In light of her disastrous morning, she'd been glad to think that at least things at home were getting back to normal.

'As I told you this morning, that is none of your business, so you can stop asking,' the woman said.

'Well, you should stop being so mean,' Clementine mumbled. It wasn't fair at all that Uncle Digby was being pushed out.

‘I beg your pardon, young lady,’ the woman replied, brushing some unexpected tears from her eyes. ‘I think you’ll find that none of this is my fault. If that silly old man had any feelings at all, he’d know exactly why I’m upset.’

Violet reached into her pocket for a handkerchief. She blew her nose then dabbed at her face.

‘Anyway, your mother has made a cake. Would you like to come down for afternoon tea?’

Clementine hadn’t meant to upset her grandmother again. ‘Is it chocolate?’ she asked quietly.

‘With sprinkles,’ the woman replied.

Clementine heard her tummy growl right on cue. She pushed back the covers and hopped out of bed, following the woman out the door and down the kitchen stairs.

‘Hello, darling.’ Clarissa turned from where she was stirring something in a huge pot on the stove. She yawned widely, her left hand



resting on her tummy. She did both of those things a lot lately.

‘Mummy, you look ‘sausted,’ Clementine said, running to give Clarissa and the baby a cuddle. She kissed her mother’s tummy five times then whispered, ‘I love you, baby,’ against the bump. She rested her ear against her mother’s stomach in case there was a reply.

Digby Pertwhistle walked over to the woman and raised his eyebrows. ‘Hand me that spoon, Clarissa, and I’ll take care of the soup. You need to sit down and have a cup of tea and a piece of cake, especially if you’re going to make it through the evening with guests for dinner. I wish you would have cancelled them when there was still time.’

‘Yes, that would have been much better all round,’ Aunt Violet echoed. Digby turned and smiled at her but she looked away.

Clarissa sighed. ‘I couldn’t, Uncle Digby. It’s Mr Popov’s special birthday. He’s seventy

and they booked a long while ago. How was I to know that this this would happen,' she patted her tummy.

Clementine giggled.

'What are you laughing at?' Violet asked the girl, who had climbed up onto a chair and was sipping the mug of hot chocolate Uncle Digby had placed there for her.

'Popov,' Clementine said. 'I wonder if he does lots of pop offs. That will make the house even smellier than when Will and Drew are home.'

Violet rolled her eyes. 'Your humour is getting as bad as your brother's. Speaking of whom, is he back yet?'

Clarissa nodded as she put on the kettle. 'Yes, Pierre dropped him off a little while ago. He was reading in his room. I'll give him a shout,' she said, then gasped.

The rest of the household leapt to their feet.

'What's the matter?' Violet raced over to her niece.

Clarissa giggled. 'I think this baby is going to be joining your soccer team before we know it, Clemmie.' She took the girl's hand and placed it on the kicking foot.

Clementine grinned, then bit her lip. Even more reason to make sure that she had everything organised, and the sooner the better.



THE POPOV PARTY

Clarissa had just sat down to drink her tea when the doorbell rang. She glanced at the kitchen clock and sighed.

‘They’re quite a bit earlier than I expected,’ she said, placing her cup on the saucer with a chink.

‘You stay right there.’ Aunt Violet held her pointer finger aloft. ‘Clementine and I can greet them.’

‘Thank you,’ Clarissa said, and gave a tired smile.

Will, who was now sitting at the kitchen table reading a book, was glad to hear that he wasn’t going to have to help this time.

‘Come along, Clemmie,’ her grandmother instructed, picking up the requisite paperwork from the sideboard. ‘Pertwhistle and Will can get the bags.’

Will’s head popped up. So much for getting out of things.

‘His name is Uncle Digby,’ Clementine muttered under her breath. She hated that her grandmother was being so stubborn about sorting things out. It was getting ridiculous. Clementine straightened the blue bow in her hair then skipped ahead down the hall and opened the front door. After her unsuccessful trip to the village, the girl had changed into a pinafore, which her grandmother had commented was much nicer than her old overalls.

‘Hello. Welcome to Penberthy House Hotel,’ the child said, and gave a curtsy. ‘My name is Clementine Rose Appleby and I live here.’

There was a gushing chorus of replies from the three adults on the doorstep. If there was one thing Clementine had learned during her young life, it was how to charm the guests – when she wasn’t accidentally creating disasters. Happily, she was getting much better at the charming part and the messes had become fewer and further between.

‘Good afternoon, I’m Violet Appleby,’ said Aunt Violet, and invited the group into the foyer.

An older man with a shock of grey hair and looks befitting a movie star introduced himself as Nikolai Popov before presenting his daughter, Katie Froggett, her husband, Matthew, and their little boy, Niki. Katie was very stylish in a smart pair of grey trousers and a white silk blouse with a bow at the neck. Her long dark hair was swept into a high ponytail with a fancy clip. Matthew wore

a white shirt, a houndstooth jacket and a pair of dark jeans. Niki was equally well dressed in long navy trousers and a checked shirt with a red bow tie. He looked about two years old, and was clutching a grey rabbit with floppy ears – one of which was in his mouth.

Clementine thought it would be fun to have a toddler in the house for the next week. Maybe she could offer to help look after Niki, as practice for her own baby brother or sister. He was very cute.

‘Welcome and happy birthday, Mr Popov,’ Violet smiled at him. ‘I hear you’re celebrating this week.’

The man reached out to take her hand but instead of shaking it, he lifted it upwards and grazed it with his lips.

Clementine giggled, wondering what Uncle Digby would make of the man’s greeting. She knew that he still cared about Aunt Violet, even if she was ignoring him and being mean.

‘Oh, Mr Popov.’ Aunt Violet blushed, her left hand spanning her chest.

'I had no idea that our hostess would be so young and beautiful,' the man said in a posh European accent.

Clementine pulled a face. 'She's not the hostess. This is mummy's hotel, and she looks like she swallowed a beach ball, but that's just because she's about to have my baby brother or sister in three weeks, if they come at the right time. Aunt Violet is Mummy's aunt and my granny. I used to think she was my great aunt, but her daughter was my other mummy, the one who carried me in her tummy – she died. That was sad. Granny's as old as Uncle Digby and they're –'

Violet gave the child a sharp nudge, stopping her rambling in its tracks.

Their guests had expressed emotions from surprise to sadness to shock as Clementine spoke, and were now chuckling with laughter at the child's candidness.

'Goodness me, Clementine, that is quite the potted family history. Perhaps one day you'll learn to use some tact when you tell it,'

Violet pursed her lips and the guests laughed again.

‘Grandchildren are the joy of our lives, are they not,’ Mr Popov said.

‘Sometimes,’ Violet sighed, and Clementine grimaced, hoping that she wasn’t going to be in big trouble when everyone went to their rooms.

‘You said that your mother is having a baby?’ Mr Popov considered the child curiously.

Clementine nodded. ‘She’s about to pop – but she promised not to have it this week while you’re here.’

The man frowned.

Violet caught sight of his anxious expression. ‘Rest assured, sir, we have everything in hand. In the unlikely event that Clarissa goes early, Penberthy House Hotel will be absolutely fine. Couldn’t be more organised if we tried, really.’

Clementine thought that was overstating things a bit – the house wasn’t really ready for the baby, and she still had all of her surprises to collect.

‘That’s good to know, Miss Appleby.’ He glanced at his grandson. ‘Niki here is the light of my life. There’s something very special about being a grandparent. You must all be terribly excited to have a little one about to arrive.’

‘Yes, we are,’ Violet said with a smile. Clementine could only agree. She grinned at Niki. Just seeing the toddler made her feel all giddy inside. She imagined that her own baby brother or sister would make her even happier.

‘But, please, can we get that awful thing off him?’ Mr Popov reached out to take the rabbit, but the child clutched it more tightly and his lip began to quiver.

‘Papa, you know how much he loves Babbit,’ Katie said, swatting the old man’s hand away. She turned to Aunt Violet. ‘Could we go to our rooms? We’re off on a tour of the village in half an hour and would like to freshen up.’

‘That will be a bit boring,’ Clementine said.

The woman peered at the child, her brows pinched.

‘There’s only one shop, and the church, and the village hall and not many houses,’ Clementine said.

‘Penberthy Floss is of historical significance to the local area,’ Katie explained. ‘I have notes that say so.’

‘Well, you should walk there. That will take longer,’ Clementine said.

‘Thank you, but we will take the car,’ the woman sniped, checking her watch.

Nikolai Popov pulled a funny face at Clementine. ‘Katie’s the boss this week – she’s arranged everything. Actually, she’s always the boss. She runs her own interior design business and I have no idea how she’s wangled the time off.’

‘Father,’ Katie Froggett chided. ‘Someone had to take charge to make sure we did something to celebrate your birthday. You would have sat at home on your own and wailed that no one loved you.’

Nikolai Popov rolled his eyes at Clementine, making her giggle. Mrs Froggett did seem a bit bossy, that's for sure.

While her grandmother allocated the rooms, Clementine followed Niki to the staircase, ready to catch him if he fell.

'Hello,' she said. 'I like your bow tie.'

The boy smiled, showing off the cutest dimples. Clementine thought her heart was going to melt.

'My name's Clemmie.'

He repeated the word. 'Lemmie.'

'Nearly got it.' Clementine beamed and held out her hand. 'Can I see your bunny?' she asked, reaching for the tatty rabbit with the wet ear. Niki held the toy out to her, but as Clementine took it his face crumpled – then he did something completely unexpected. Niki clamped his baby teeth down hard on Clementine's finger.

'Ow!' Clementine squealed, pulling away. Fat tears began to pool in the corners of her eyes.

Aunt Violet looked up from her paperwork. 'Whatever's the matter now?'

'He bit me.' Clementine's voice wobbled and she did her best not to cry.

'Niki's never bitten anyone. What did you do?' Katie said and snatched the child up into her arms.

Clementine recoiled. Niki's little teeth marks were right there on her finger for anyone to see.

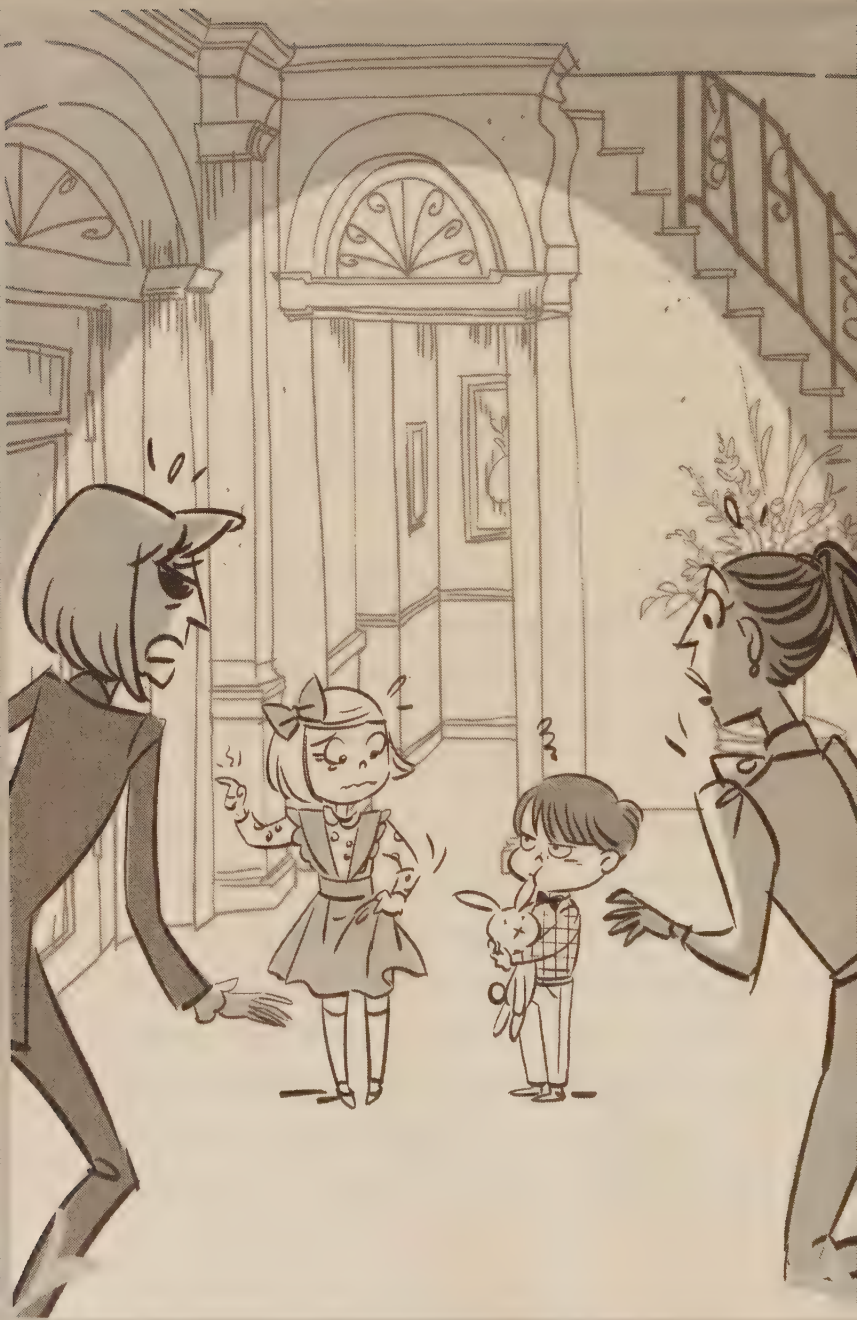
'Take him upstairs,' directed Mr Popov, a stern edge to his voice. He turned to Clementine. 'I am sorry. Niki is just coming to the end of the terrible twos – it's a tricky age.'

Matthew Popov simply shook his head and followed his wife and son.

Clementine rubbed her finger, shaken. The toddler had seemed so sweet.

Mr Popov headed upstairs, leaving Clementine alone with her grandmother.

'Show me,' the woman said. She took Clementine's finger and kissed it.



‘I only asked to see his rabbit,’ Clementine said.

‘Don’t worry – he’s had a long drive and is probably just out of sorts,’ Violet said. ‘Not all babies are biters.’

Clementine hoped that her grandmother was right.



BREAKFAST BATTLES

‘Be quiet!’

Clementine yelled the words down the hallway, in the direction of the Froggett’s room on the floor below.

She’d tossed and turned half the night, burying her head under her pillow before resorting to more extreme measures and finding her pink earmuffs to wear.

Further along the corridor, Aunt Violet’s door opened and the woman stepped into the hall. Clementine flinched. Her grandmother’s

head looked twice its usual size, covered in rollers and a hairnet. There were bags the size of flour sacks under her eyes.

‘Godfather’s what’s wrong with the child now?’ she rasped, massaging her temples. ‘All that carry on has given me a migraine.’

‘He’s been screaming for hours,’ Clementine said. The pair was joined by Uncle Digby in his dressing-gown and slippers.

‘The boy’s got a good set of lungs, hasn’t he?’ the man said.

‘What’s wrong with him?’ Clementine asked.

Uncle Digby shrugged. ‘Maybe he’s getting some new teeth.’

‘He doesn’t need any more of those. He has a good set already,’ Clementine quipped. ‘I felt them on my finger.’

‘Perhaps he has a tummy ache. I might as well get dressed and make a start on breakfast. Hopefully your mother hasn’t been disturbed.’

‘What about me?’ Aunt Violet balled her fists. ‘I’ve barely had a wink of sleep and my head is throbbing.’

‘Please go back to bed, Violet,’ Uncle Digby entreated. ‘I’ll bring you some tea and toast shortly.’

‘Don’t you have somewhere else to be?’ the woman dismissed him with a flick of the hand.

Uncle Digby looked wounded. ‘I have nowhere I’d rather be than here with you – but if you really don’t want that . . .’

Clementine’s heart pounded. ‘Uncle Digby was just trying to be nice, Granny,’ she said.

But the woman scoffed and stalked back into her room, closing the door.

‘What’s wrong with her?’ Clementine said. Aunt Violet was treating Uncle Digby almost as badly as Joshua Tribble treated pretty much everyone at school. There had to be a reason why she was so upset, but keeping it to herself wasn’t helping the situation.

‘Let her sleep,’ Digby said. ‘Your grandmother is no use to anyone when she has a migraine.’

‘I heard that, Pertwhistle,’ a voice came through the keyhole.

‘Well, you shouldn’t be eavesdropping,’ Clementine said ‘It’s rude, and you should tell Uncle Digby what the matter is. He’s not a mind reader.’

It was no use going back to sleep. Clementine got dressed too, hoping it would be quieter in the kitchen. She gently pushed her mother’s door open and peered in on her way downstairs. Fortunately, the noise hadn’t woken Clarissa up – the woman was snoring softly, tucked under the covers with Pharaoh curled up at her feet.

‘I hope our baby is nothing like that one,’ Clementine sighed to Lavender as they padded down the stairs. ‘He’s a monster.’

Digby was in the kitchen preparing tea when Clementine arrived.

She set about getting her breakfast, and had just carried a bowl of cereal to the table, when there was a knock on the kitchen door. Clementine opened it to find Katie Froggett standing in the hallway.

The woman peered into the room, but Digby Pertwhistle had disappeared into the pantry moments beforehand. 'Excuse me, is there any chance we could have breakfast earlier than scheduled?' Katie asked. 'I'm afraid Niki's been a little unsettled and we thought if we could get something to eat and take him for a walk, that might send him off to sleep.'

'A little unsettled?' Clementine said bluntly. 'He was so loud I had to find my earmuffs, and that wasn't easy because there's a lot of stuff in my wardrobe and I haven't used them since last winter.'

Katie Froggett screwed up her face. 'Don't be silly. I'm sure you can't hear anything from upstairs. We're much too far away.'

'We can hear *everything*,' Clementine said. 'And it's put Granny in an even worse mood than when Niki threw mashed potato on her last night when she was serving your dinner.'

The woman scowled. 'That's not what happened at all.'

Clementine wondered if having a baby meant that mothers suddenly didn't see the same things everyone else did. Uncle Digby had been in the dining room too, and had told everyone later that when Mr Popov had asked Katie to take the rabbit away from Niki at the dinner table the child had thrown mashed potato at Aunt Violet, whereupon it had stuck to her chin.

Emerging from the pantry, Uncle Digby hurried over to intervene. 'Good morning, Mrs Froggett,' he said with a smile. 'How may I help you?' He gave Clementine a nudge and sent her back to her breakfast.

The woman explained what she was after, and Uncle Digby confirmed he could have breakfast ready in fifteen minutes.

'Thank you,' Katie Froggett said, and lingered at the door.

'Is there anything else I can help with?' asked Uncle Digby.

'It's going to sound silly, but you haven't seen Babbit – Niki's little long eared rabbit – have you?' the woman asked.

Digby shook his head.

‘You see, it went missing in the night. I could have sworn that I tucked it into his cot with him at bedtime, but when he woke up just after midnight it was gone and nothing would settle him,’ Katie said. ‘He’s terribly attached – that’s why he’s been so worked up.’

Clementine was listening. She hoped that someone found the tatty old thing soon. Another night of Niki’s screaming would be unbearable, and she definitely didn’t want her grandmother to be any grumpier.

‘Actually, I wondered if Clementine might have it,’ the woman said.

Clementine’s jaw dropped. The last thing she’d want is that manky old thing covered in spit and who knows what else. Besides, stealing was not something she’d ever done before, and she had no intentions of starting now.

‘No,’ the man said emphatically. ‘That’s not possible. Clementine was in her bed all night.’

‘She took it off him when we arrived yesterday.’ The woman wasn’t giving up easily. ‘Then she said that he bit her, which was a lie.’

Clementine gasped. Niki had bitten her, and her grandmother had seen the mark on her finger.

‘I can assure you, Mrs Froggett, that Clementine has nothing to do with your missing Babbit,’ Uncle Digby said, and closed the door.

‘How dare she!’ Clementine huffed. ‘I only asked to look at it and then Niki bit me! It’s true!’

‘Don’t worry, Clemmie,’ Digby said, walking back to get started with the bacon and eggs. ‘Mrs Froggett is probably just exhausted and clutching at straws. I can’t imagine her husband would have been too happy to spend the night with a screaming toddler either, let alone Mr Popov in the room next door.’

The man returned to the stove and whipped up a breakfast feast. True to his word, not fifteen minutes later he loaded the

first tray. 'Clemmie, would you mind opening the doors for me, please?'

'I don't want to go in there. Mrs Froggett thinks I'm a rabbit robber,' Clementine said. But there was no one else to help Uncle Digby this morning, so she opened the door anyway. At least Niki had stopped screaming.

In the dining room, Niki was sitting up in his high chair clutching Babbit, his face red and puffy from crying.

'Oh,' Digby said as he set the plates down on the table. 'You found it.'

Katie Froggett frowned. 'It was the oddest thing. Not long after I spoke to you it appeared like magic on the stairs. It certainly wasn't there when we came down. Someone is playing silly games and I'd appreciate if they would stop.'

She glared at Clementine, who was still standing at the door.

'It wasn't me,' the child said, folding her arms. 'I didn't take it. I wouldn't.'

'I can assure you, Mrs Froggett, Clementine has been with me in the kitchen since you popped in,' Digby Pertwhistle said sternly.

'Really? Well, it's very strange, don't you think,' Katie said.

Clementine could feel her eyes prickling, but she was determined not to cry. Mrs Froggett was mean and she wished they'd never come to stay.

'Lemmie.' Niki gave her a toothy grin. 'Babbit,' he said and held it up for her to see.

Clementine couldn't help herself from smiling back at the boy. She wondered if all toddlers were the same – screaming the house down one minute and happy the next. Surely her baby wouldn't be like that. But, deep down, she was beginning to worry that this was what her mother meant when she said that once their baby arrived, life would never be the same again.



PLANS

Clementine stared out her window into the front garden, feeling all mixed up inside. Why did Mrs Froggett think she would take Niki's rabbit? Clementine hated being accused of something she didn't do – like when Joshua Tribble said she'd copied from Astrid's work and Mrs Bottomley had believed him until she realised that it was Joshua who had cheated. At least Mrs Bottomley had said she was sorry.

There was a knock on the door and Will poked his head inside the room. Clementine spun around in her chair, her face glum.

'What's the matter?' he asked, resting his shoulder against the door frame.

Will, who could sleep through an earthquake and a hurricane even if they happened at the same time, had managed to miss the entire screaming toddler and early breakfast debacles. He looked sympathetic as Clementine explained.

'Don't worry about it, Clemmie. Grown-ups sometimes say things they don't mean,' the boy said, trying to cheer her up. 'Do you want to play soccer?'

Clementine shook her head.

'Go for a bike ride?' he tried again.

Clementine sighed. 'I haven't got time.' She still had all her gifts to collect.

'What are you doing?' the boy asked.

'Just stuff,' she replied mysteriously.

'Can I help?' he said.

'No,' Clementine shook her head again.

Will plonked down on the end of her bed and fell backwards. 'But I'm bored. I wish Jules was here.'

Clementine thought about it. The baby was going to be as much Will's little brother or sister as it was hers. Maybe another pair of hands could be useful on her mission.

'Okay, but you have to keep everything a secret,' Clementine said twisting to and fro in her chair. 'You can't tell anyone, or it won't be a surprise.'

'What are you talking about?' he asked.

Clementine picked up her notebook, walked over to sit beside the boy on the bed and showed him the double page with her list. Will's eyes widened as he read the text. 'What's this?'

'All the things I'm getting for the baby,' Clementine said. 'And the people who are helping me – except I think some of them have forgotten and everyone else is away on holiday. So I need to make some calls to remind them, or nothing will be ready in time.'

Will chuckled. 'Really? You've organised all this?'

Clementine turned and glared at the boy. 'Why are you laughing?'

'Because the baby won't be able to use any of this stuff for ages,' Will said. 'Babies need nappies and dummies and blankets, not tutus and ballet shoes and wagons that Lavender can pull in a harness.' He laughed again, though he had to admit that he loved the drawing of the pig pulling a little trolley with the toothless, waving baby inside.

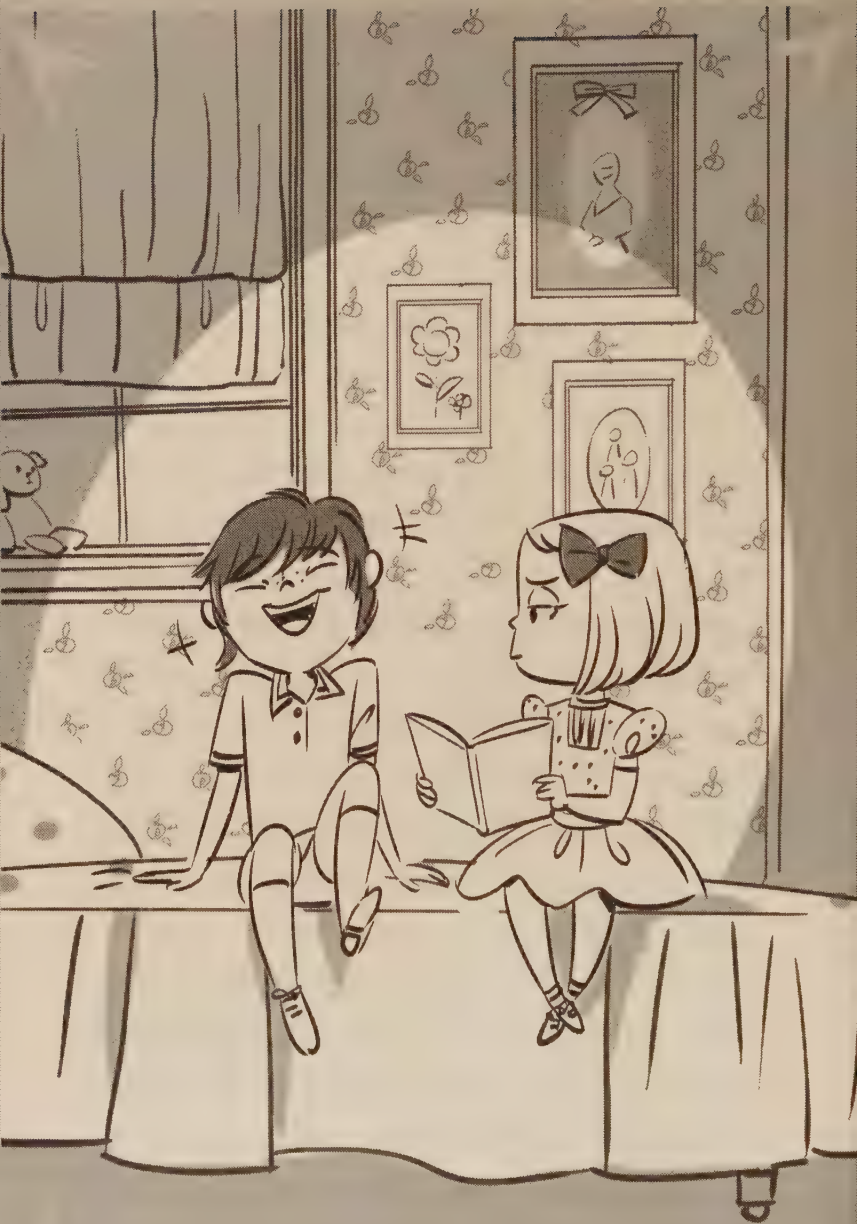
Clementine could feel the heat rising up into her cheeks. 'Says who?'

'Everyone,' Will said.

Clementine slammed the book shut and pushed herself off the bed. She stormed to her desk and thumped it down.

'They're cool things, Clemmie – but you know the baby won't do anything except eat and sleep and cry for a long time,' Will said.

'No one cares about the baby as much as I do,' Clementine huffed. 'It doesn't even have



a bed yet because the cot's still flat in a box on the floor in the nursery – which is a big mess too. If the baby comes tomorrow it will have to sleep in a drawer like Mr Smee showed us happened in the olden days.'

'No, it won't,' Will said. 'Dad's going to put everything together when he gets home at the end of the week. And it's not true that you're the only one who cares about the baby. I can't wait – it's going to be awesome.'

Will slid off the bed.

'Don't tell anyone about this,' Clementine said, wishing she hadn't shared her plans. She'd put a lot of thinking time into the items on her list, and they were perfect for the baby. Will was being a stinky stupid brother. She hoped the baby was a girl more than ever.

'It's your secret,' he said. 'But you should look at those gifts again. All that stuff is a bit of a waste.'

Clementine's nose wrinkled. 'It is not!'

‘Whatever you say, Clemmie,’ Will said and stalked out of the room.



Clementine laid on the bed and looked at her notes. Will didn't know any more about babies than she did. She ran her finger down the list of names. Mr and Mrs Mogg, Father Bob, Mrs Tribble, Ana, Mr Smee, Pierre, Odette, Sebastian Smote and Mrs Bottomley. After what had happened with Father Bob, it was probably a good idea she remind everyone that there wasn't much time left before the baby arrived. Her mother had a special book downstairs with important telephone numbers – Clementine would borrow it and make her calls, and then she'd go to see if Mrs Mogg was home yet. Satisfied with her plan, Clementine wandered out into the hall and spotted Uncle Digby with a skyscraping pile of towels.

‘Are you feeling better?’ he said, peeking around the tower.

Clementine shook her head. 'Not really. Did you take Granny some tea and toast?'

Digby shook his head as well. 'No, I've decided to leave her be this morning.'

'Mr Popov kissed Granny's hand yesterday when they arrived and he told her she was beautiful,' Clementine blabbed, then wished that she'd kept quiet when she saw the forlorn look on Uncle Digby's face.

'Well, he's a very charming man and your grandmother is stunning. I can understand why he would tell her that.' Uncle Digby replied with a note of sadness in his voice. 'What have you got planned for this fine day?'

'I'm going to see Mrs Mogg,' Clementine said.

Uncle Digby frowned. 'I'm afraid she and Mr Mogg have had to make a dash to see Mrs Mogg's sister. The poor woman has taken ill. That's why the shop was closed yesterday.'

'Who's there today?' Clementine asked.

'I'm not sure,' Uncle Digby said.

‘Then I need to go to Highton Mill instead,’ Clementine said. ‘Can you take me?’

The man set the towels down on the sideboard. ‘I’m afraid I don’t think I’ll have time, sweetheart. I’ve got to do the rooms and some washing. Why do you want to go there?’

‘It’s a surprise,’ Clementine said. She planned to visit Mrs Bottomley and Mr Smee, but Uncle Digby couldn’t know that.

‘Sorry, Clemmie, not today. And your mother is up to her elbows in baking downstairs and I’d like her to have a rest this afternoon before the guests arrive back for their afternoon tea, so please don’t ask her, either.’

Clementine sighed. ‘Could you help me get the nursery ready when you’ve finished your jobs instead?’ Surely there was something useful she could do for the baby today, even if she couldn’t collect her gifts.

Digby shook his head. ‘I’m afraid I have to go out.’

Clementine didn't like the sound of that one bit. 'Where?' she asked.

But the man changed the subject. 'It's funny, but I remembered after breakfast that you used to have a rabbit almost the same as little Niki's.'

Clementine wrinkled her nose. 'Really? Did I throw tantrums when someone tried to take it off me?'

Digby chuckled. 'Not that I can remember.'

'Where is it now?' Clementine asked.

'It might have gone out to a charity when your mother was having a clean-up, or I think there's still a box of your old toys up in the attic.' The man smiled. 'You loved that rabbit more than anything until Lavender came along.'

Uncle Digby picked up the pile of towels. 'I'd better get this lot done,' he said. 'Why don't you do some craft, Clemmie, or a painting?'

Clementine wrinkled her nose. Now that her plans for the day were ruined and

Will was being annoying, she had to find something to pass the time. Craft was boring. But painting . . . Uncle Digby had given her the best idea. Painting was exactly what she'd do!



AN ARTIST AT WORK

Clementine waited until Uncle Digby had gone downstairs, then gathered up all her paints and brushes, and some pencils too.

The nursery was in a small bedroom next to her mother and Drew's room. It used to be full of junk, but Drew had cleared it out when they found out that the baby was on its way, then painted the horrible brown walls to make the room a warm shade of white. Her mother had planned to paint a

line of African animals circling the walls, to match the bed linen Mrs Mogg had made for the cot, but they'd never got around to finishing the room off. This was Clementine's chance to be helpful.

Clementine studied one of the pillowcases, then she unscrewed the lids of her paints and squirted an array of blobs into the plastic paint tray.

She looked at the wall and decided that chin height would be just about right. That would be her guide so that everything was level. Clementine dipped her brush into the black paint and within a minute or so a zebra adorned the wall. It was a little wonky, but not bad for her first attempt.

'What do you think, Lavender?' she asked the little pig, who was investigating the paint pots.

There was no reply. Clementine took this as a compliment – Lavender could be a harsh critic at times.



‘Next, I’m going to do an elephant with a long trunk.’ Clementine swished her brush in the jar of water she’d filled in the bathroom sink, and dried it before dipping it into the sunflower yellow paint.

‘Wow!’ Clementine exclaimed a few moments later. ‘That looks amazing.’ She picked up another brush and painted the eyes, mouth, nose and whiskers in black.

Her next animal was a giraffe, then a monkey. She planned to repeat the pattern over and over all the way round the room.

‘I’m not painting any crocodiles, because they’re too scary,’ the girl told Lavender. ‘I don’t want the baby to think they’re going to be chomped in their sleep.’

Clementine wiped her brow. Painting was harder work than she expected, especially when she had to concentrate so much to make sure that it was level. She didn’t realise she’d left a blob of red paint on her cheek. Clementine stepped back to admire her handiwork. The monkey was a bit low, but

maybe she could paint a little vine to make it look like he was hanging down on purpose. Her stomach grumbled. She'd finish the frieze later – it was almost lunchtime, and she still had her phone calls to make. She'd do that first then think about something to eat.

Clementine put her paints in the corner of the room and dipped the dirty brushes into the water. She protected the tray with a special plastic cover so the paints wouldn't dry out and no one would step on them by accident. They would be safe there until she came back, but with everyone so busy, she thought she could finish it off before anyone discovered her masterpiece. She was beginning to feel much better – everything was going to be perfect for the baby. She just knew it.



CALLS

Clementine was surprised to find the kitchen empty, but at least she could borrow her mother's telephone book without anyone being the wiser.

'Come on, Lavender,' Clementine said, picking up the little black book.

The pair walked out through the swinging kitchen door and down the hall to the rear of the house. Clementine could hear Uncle Digby whistling upstairs and she spotted her mother cutting roses in the garden outside.

That was good – she'd be able to talk in private.

Clementine entered the library, then climbed up on the green leather chair that had belonged to her grandfather many years before. She wriggled onto her knees to be able to see over the desk properly and reached for the telephone. Clementine opened the book to the letter 's' and dialled the number for Mr Smee.

'Hello, it's Clementine Rose Appleby,' she said when the man answered, and took off to explain the situation in a rush. She wanted everything to be just right for the baby, and she was hoping to get the present Mr Smee had promised to make for her because it was getting so close now and no one else seemed in a hurry to get anything ready, but if the baby came early they were in trouble.

Her teacher chuckled and promised that he had almost finished; he would bring the soccer goals out on the weekend. The girl

insisted that it would be better if he came before then, just in case.

Unbeknownst to Clementine, Will had been curled up in the big brown armchair, facing the window reading a comic when she entered the room. Now he was listening intently to Clementine's conversation, grinning to himself and thinking that it would be ages before their little brother or sister could walk, let alone play soccer. But the idea of it *was* kind of cute.

Clementine hung up the phone.

'Well, I'm pleased that someone has remembered,' she said to Lavender, who was rolling about under the desk scratching her back on the floor.

Clementine called Mrs Bottomley next, but the woman didn't answer. She left her a long and detailed message.

Sebastian Smote said he was too busy to talk when she called him, and when the girl reminded him what he'd promised, the man made a pffling sound and told her that he



really didn't have time. He had a wedding this weekend and was dealing with a disaster the likes of which he'd never seen before.

She hung up the phone and sighed sadly. 'Honestly, Lavender, why do I even bother?'

Will frowned. Poor Clementine – she really was trying hard. It didn't seem fair that things weren't exactly working out, and he felt quite mean for having laughed at her earlier.

'I'm starving, Lavender,' the girl said and hopped down from the chair. She shooed the pig outside and the pair hurried back to the kitchen where Clarissa was arranging the roses into several crystal vases.

'Hello, darling, what have you been up to?' the woman asked, concentrating on clipping thorns from stems.

Clementine returned the black book to the sideboard before her mother noticed she'd had it, and skipped to the pantry where she retrieved a loaf of bread.

'A surprise,' the child said. 'But it's not finished yet, so don't ask me anything else.'

Clarissa was intrigued, but she hoped that – whatever it was – Clementine’s plan wouldn’t go sideways. She was too tired to deal with the unexpected, and she was still worried about Uncle Digby and Aunt Violet. She’d tried to speak to her aunt earlier and was told to mind her own business. The last thing the family needed was a rift.

‘Well, when you head back upstairs to your surprise can you take those shirts over there and hang them up in Uncle Digby’s room, please?’ Clarissa asked.

‘Okay,’ Clementine said.

The child made herself a honey sandwich, feeding half to Lavender before charging upstairs with the shirts.

She knocked on Uncle Digby’s bedroom door, but there was no answer, so Clementine pushed her way inside. She had hung the shirts on the little rack Uncle Digby called a valet and turned to leave when she spotted the man’s suitcase lying open on the armchair by the side of the bed.

Clementine gasped. Uncle Digby was packing? That could only mean one thing: Aunt Violet had got her way and the man was leaving.

Clementine could see underwear and trousers and shirts, and there was even a pair of pyjamas. This was a disaster. Something in the corner of the case caught her eye. Clementine reached in and picked up a small black box. She was about to take a peek inside when the doorknob turned.

The child recoiled and dropped the box, not noticing as it missed the suitcase and fell between the cushions on the chair, disappearing out of sight. She scurried to the valet and tried to look as if she'd just finished hanging the shirts.

'Oh, hello, Clemmie.' Uncle Digby walked into the room. 'Thank you for bringing those up. I really have to get organised by this afternoon.' He rubbed his head and sighed. 'What's that on your cheek?'

Clementine spun around and glanced in

the mirror on the dressing table, then quickly licked her finger and rubbed the paint off.

‘Nothing. Are you all right, Uncle Digby?’ Clementine asked, trying not to look in the direction of the suitcase.

‘Just a bit tired. Apart from the screaming last night that kept us awake, I’ve discovered that little Niki has left quite the trail of destruction downstairs. I’ve had a lot more cleaning than usual this morning,’ he said. ‘But I’m almost finished, and once I’ve set up the afternoon tea I’ll come back and deal with the packing, then I really have to get over to the cottage.’

Clementine flinched. She couldn’t bear the thought of Uncle Digby moving out – he’d been part of her life forever and she loved him as much as her mummy, and Granny, and Drew, and Will and the new baby, even though it wasn’t born yet. Clementine’s mind was racing. There had to be a way to stop him before it was too late.



KEEPING BUSY

Uncle Digby had asked Clementine if she wouldn't mind heading downstairs to see if he'd left his feather duster in the sitting room. He was busy distributing vases of fresh flowers to the guest rooms and the child could run down and back in a flash – his knees weren't what they once were. The clock in the entrance hall struck one. The Popovs wouldn't return to the hotel for a couple of hours.

Clementine stopped at the hall mirror to double check she'd got rid of all the paint, and noticed there was a line of tiny palm prints on the glass. Niki. Why did toddlers have to touch everything – especially with sticky fingers? Uncle Digby obviously hadn't found every mess yet.

'Uncle Digby,' the girl shouted. 'Uncle Digby, come quickly!'

Clementine could hear the thudding of feet as the man ran along the upstairs hall. His red face appeared over the balustrade on the stairs.

'Goodness, Clemmie, whatever's the matter?' he asked.

'More jobs,' she said, pointing to the mirror. 'Would you like me to clean it?'

Digby shook his head. 'Please don't touch it, Clemmie. I'll do it. I just have to finish the flowers.' The last time Clementine had tried to clean a mirror, she'd ended up making it ten times worse. Clearly Uncle Digby hadn't forgotten.

'At this rate, I don't think I'll be going anywhere,' the man mumbled and disappeared back to the bedrooms.

Clementine smiled to herself. That was the best news she'd heard all day, and it gave her an idea. If Uncle Digby had more jobs to do, then he couldn't possibly leave.

Clementine ran into the sitting room and mussed up the cushions on the chairs, then picked up the pot of ashes from the fireplace and poured its contents onto the rug. She found a tissue in her pocket and tore it to pieces before scattering it on the floor. Then she reached up and moved the paintings so they were at odd angles. Uncle Digby couldn't stand it when the artwork wasn't straight, sometimes using a spirit level to make sure that everything sat perfectly.

A few minutes later the butler stalked down the stairs.

'Uncle Digby!' Clementine called from the sitting room.

‘What is it now?’ he said, and hurried to the doorway.

‘You’re not going to like this,’ the girl said.

Digby frowned. ‘Oh, good heavens, that child is a monster!’

Clementine felt a twinge in her tummy. She knew it was wrong to make it seem as if Niki was responsible for the chaos she’d created, but the boy had already made lots of mess – and if there was a little bit more and it stopped Uncle Digby from leaving, then was that really so bad?



FINGER PAINTING

Niki had been mercifully silent last night, and Clementine had slept much better. She still felt bad about making all the messes for Uncle Digby to clean up, even though it did mean he hadn't gone anywhere yet.

Now, she stood back from the nursery wall and admired her work. Apart from a slightly wonky lion's tail and a monkey with a cheesy grin, the animals were perfect. She'd got up early to finish the painting.

‘Mummy and Drew will love it, don’t you think, Lavender?’ Clementine smiled at her little pig. Lavender grunted and scratched her back against the box on the floor.

‘That’s the next job,’ Clementine agreed, wondering how hard it would be to put the cot together. Drew said that he would probably have to do another university degree to figure it out, but Uncle Digby said you just needed an Allen key and to follow the instructions carefully. Clementine’s reading was excellent these days, but she didn’t know anyone named Allen, so finding the right key might be tricky.

‘Clemmie!’ Clarissa’s voice echoed through the house.

‘Come on, Lavender, we don’t want anyone to see the surprise yet.’ Clementine left her paints in the middle of the room and quickly shooed the teacup pig outside into the hall.

‘I’m up here, Mummy,’ Clementine called back. She could hear her mother’s footsteps on the kitchen stairs.

‘Sweetheart, would you mind helping me with the morning tea?’ the woman asked. ‘Aunt Violet’s at her fashion parade fundraiser and Uncle Digby had to go inspect the cottage.’

Clementine’s eyes widened. ‘What cottage?’

But before her mother could reply, the telephone rang. Clarissa rushed downstairs to answer it.

Clementine followed with Lavender hot on her heels.

When the pair reached the kitchen Clarissa had just hung up.

‘That was Odette. She and Sophie have arrived back home, and they were wondering if you’d like to have a sleepover tomorrow night,’ Clarissa said.

But Clementine shook her head. She didn’t want to be away from the house. She had to stop Uncle Digby from leaving, and what if the baby came when she wasn’t there? Everything would be okay, but only if she stayed on top of things.

Clarissa was surprised by Clementine's reply – she usually loved having sleepovers with Sophie – but she let the matter lie. There simply wasn't time to get to the bottom of another mystery right now.

'Mr Popov and the Froggetts are in the sitting room. They've decided to have a *quiet* day in,' Clarissa said. 'So that means I've got a very *busy* day – which I wasn't expecting.' The woman grimaced.

'Are you all right, Mummy?' Clementine looked at her mother with concern.

'Fine, darling. Just a twinge. Nothing to be worried about.' Clarissa smiled tightly. 'Would you help me take this through?'

Clementine nodded. She picked up a tray containing a plate of chocolate brownies and a plate of butterfly cupcakes and carried it carefully behind her mother, who propped open the swinging door to the hall.

'Doesn't this look lovely,' Nikolai Popov said, as Clarissa set the tea pot down on the coffee table and took the tray from

Clementine. This morning the man was dressed in casual cream pants and a red and blue checked shirt.

'I'll just get the sandwiches and date loaf,' Clarissa said and hurried from the room, cradling her bulging belly.

'Your grandmother tells us that you are quite the performer, Clementine,' Mr Popov said with a grin as the Froggetts arrived in the room.

Clementine shrugged. 'Sometimes.' She wasn't keen to stay in the room with Katie Froggett any longer than she had to.

The woman put Niki on the ground, where he immediately ran towards the cakes, almost sending them flying.

'Katie, please, you need to keep that boy under control.' Nikolai shook his head.

'Father, he's a toddler,' the woman chided. 'Everyone knows that's not possible.'

Clementine hoped that wasn't true.

'Do you think you could recite one of your poems for us?' Mr Popov asked.

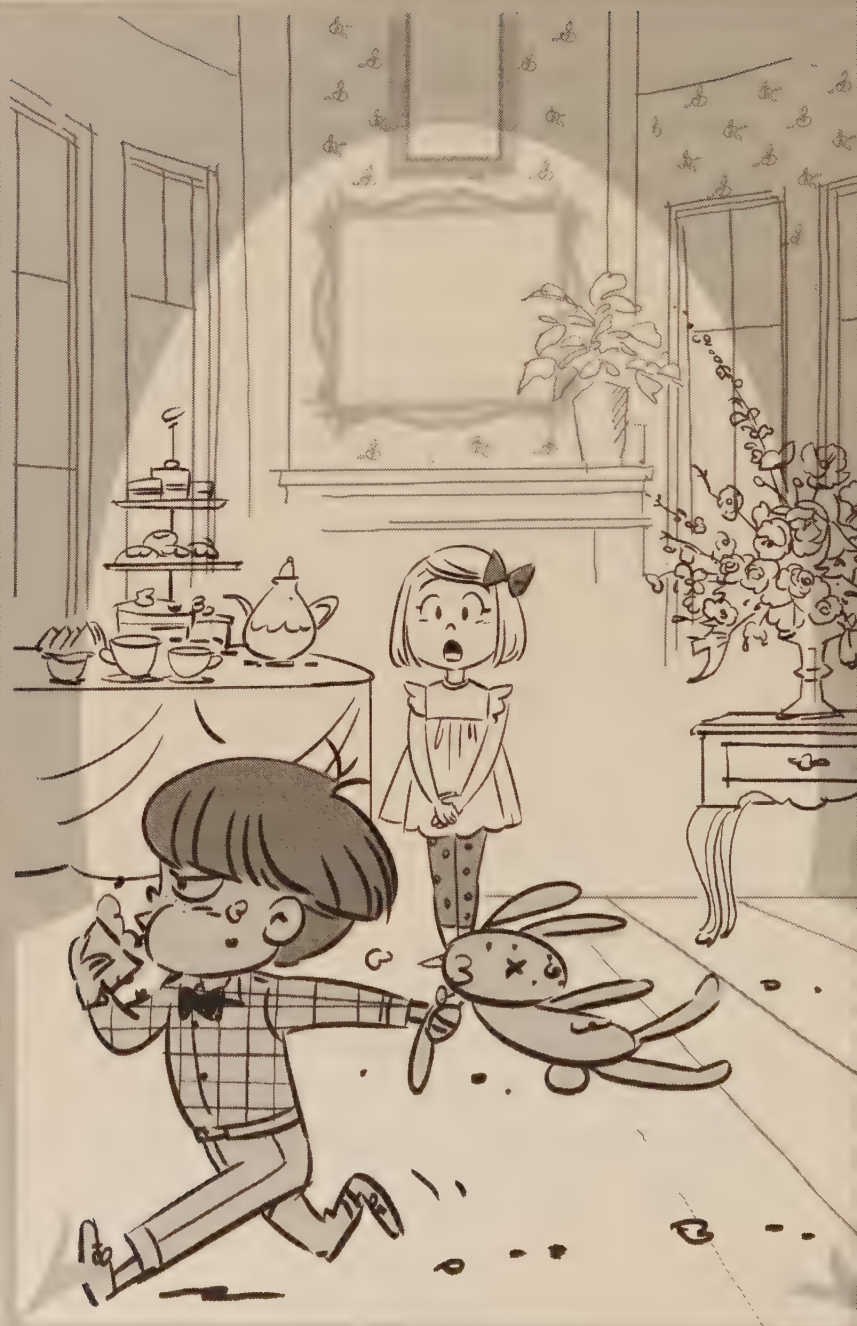
‘Maybe,’ Clementine said quietly.

‘We’d love to hear one,’ Katie Froggett said, and her husband gave an encouraging nod.

The girl thought about it. The woman seemed interested, and at least Clementine wasn’t being accused of stealing that horrible Babbit again. Niki was walking around the room, dragging the toy in one hand and with a fistful of cake in the other, dropping crumbs everywhere. Uncle Digby would have plenty more jobs to do as soon as he got home, and this time Clementine had nothing to do with it.

‘Okay,’ Clementine said. ‘This is a poem about our new baby.’

The girl launched in, and by the time she finished she saw that Mr Popov was beaming with tears in his eyes. Katie Froggett said the poem was lovely and asked Clementine who the author was. When the child said she’d written it herself, the guests were even more impressed.



‘You do know that life with a baby won’t be anything like that, though,’ Matthew Froggett said with a shudder. ‘There will be mess everywhere, and you’ll be completely sick and tired of the crying and smells, and one minute the child loves you to bits and the next they’re throwing tantrums. And don’t even think about trying to separate them from their favourite toy, no matter how revolting it is.’

Mr Popov nodded. ‘Someone needs to take that jolly thing and throw it away.’

‘Father! Please don’t even think about it. It was bad enough the other night when Babbit went missing.’ Katie glared at Clementine, earning herself a nudge from her husband.

‘Stop it, Katie. She’s just a little girl,’ Matthew rebuked. Nikolai Popov turned his attention to his tea cup.

The woman hadn’t forgotten after all. Clementine’s tummy felt sick.

Clarissa reappeared with the rest of the morning tea.

After much cajoling, Mr Popov convinced Clementine to tell them another poem. This time, she decided on the one from her mother's wedding. When she finished there were even more tears from the man. Clementine thought he was a bit emotional.

Clarissa told the guests to ring the bell if they needed anything more. She'd have their picnic ready by midday. The family was planning to go for a walk at lunch time, and hoped to find a spot down by the stream at the end of the road to eat.

'And dinner will be served at seven,' the woman added. She was going to be exhausted by tonight.

Clarissa and Clementine walked back to the kitchen. 'That was lovely of you to share your poems,' the woman said.

'Except that Mr Froggett said that I've got babies all wrong.' Clementine sighed 'Do you

think our baby will be as much of a monster as Niki?’

Clarissa smiled. ‘It’s impossible to know, really. All children are different – they come with their own personality and quirks – but if this little miracle is anything like you and your brother, I think we’ll be just fine.’

Clementine hugged her mother’s tummy.

‘Ohh,’ Clarissa gasped, then shivered.

‘Are you sure you’re all right, Mummy?’ Clementine stared at her belly.

‘It was just a cramp,’ she said. ‘I might sit down for a minute. Perhaps you could pop up and get my cardigan from the end of the bed?’

Clementine rushed up to the top floor via the back stairs, and was surprised to see Mrs Froggett nursing Niki on the landing in the middle of the hall.

‘Come here, you little escape artist,’ Clementine heard the woman say. ‘And what have you got all over yourself?’ The pair promptly disappeared down the front stairs.

Clementine frowned. Guests weren't supposed to be up here. Recently, her mother had decided that the top floor was for family only. Clarissa was happy to forego a couple of bedrooms for the sake of family privacy – especially with the baby coming. Clementine would have to tell her mother that they might need a rope for the people who couldn't read the new 'private' sign properly.

Clementine hurried to her mother's room to get the cardigan, but on the way out she noticed the door to the nursery was ajar. She'd definitely closed it earlier – she still had to build the cot and hadn't wanted anyone seeing the half-finished room by accident.

Clementine pushed her way inside and stopped short. She couldn't believe her eyes. The place was a disaster – there were red blobs of paint on her zebras and green smudges everywhere. Her artwork was ruined and she knew exactly who was to blame.



FINGER POINTING

Clementine flew out of the nursery and down the main stairs, skidding across the entrance foyer to the sitting room.

‘I need to talk to Mrs Froggett,’ she puffed, before realising that there was no one there, and the plates, cups and saucers had been cleared away. Surely the family hadn’t left for their picnic yet? It was only eleven o’clock, and her mother had said it wouldn’t be ready until midday.

Movement through the window caught her eye. The guests were in the front garden.

She charged through the front door and down the steps.

'Is everything all right, Clementine?' Mr Popov asked.

'No!' Clementine could feel herself getting hotter and hotter. 'Niki ruined everything.'

The boy was running around with his father, playing chasings and squealing with delight.

Katie Froggett hurried to her father.

'What are you talking about, Clementine?' the woman demanded.

'Niki was upstairs and he painted over my jungle animals in the nursery. It was meant to be a surprise for Mummy and Drew but now it's a big mess,' Clementine blurted.

'That's ridiculous. Niki wouldn't do any such thing. He's not even big enough to open the doors,' the woman's face was pinched.

On the grass, Niki dropped his rabbit and began to scream.

Mr Popov glanced at the toddler and glowered before turning back to his daughter. 'Are you sure?' he asked. 'He *was* missing for a while.'

'And I saw you on the top landing where guests are not allowed to go,' Clementine said, a fierce frown on her forehead.

'He was simply climbing up and down the stairs. It was a game – once toddlers start on stairs you can't stop them,' Katie replied with a tight smile.

But Clementine wasn't having any of it.

'I can show you,' she said.

'But guests aren't allowed on the top floor,' the woman replied. 'We wouldn't want to break the rules.' Her eyes narrowed.

Digby Pertwhistle had just pulled into the driveway, parking his old banger down by the side of the garage. He strode around to the front of the house.

'Clementine, what's the matter?' he asked. The girl was standing with her hands on her hips, her face red and eyebrows cross.

She reminded him of Violet when she was in a flap.

'Niki's made the biggest mess ever,' Clementine said, her lip trembling.

'She's making it up,' Katie Froggett snapped. 'Niki is two. She's just saying it because I thought she might have taken Babbit the other night.'

'Well, that's an awful thing to say to a child,' Nikolai Popov stared at his daughter.

Digby Pertwhistle could only agree. Either Niki's mother didn't know her boy as well as she thought she did, or she had blinkers on.

'Come inside, Clemmie, and I'll take a look,' Uncle Digby said kindly. He reached for her hand and steered her back to the house.

Clementine was sobbing as they walked into the house, and the tears simply wouldn't stop. It was all too much. Uncle Digby was moving out, he and Aunt Violet weren't in love anymore, Will said her presents were stupid and hardly anyone remembered they'd

promised to help her, and now another of her surprises was ruined.

‘I don’t want to talk about it,’ Clementine gulped, and raced away upstairs. She flew into her room and threw herself down on the bed, where she cried until there were no tears left.



QUIETER MOMENTS

Clementine's eyes fluttered open and she rolled over. She felt a lot better than before, even though her gifts weren't ready and there was still a disaster to deal with in the nursery. It was almost dark outside – she'd managed to put a lot of sleep in the bank.

There was a knock on the door and Aunt Violet walked into the room carrying a tray with two boiled eggs and a plate of toasty soldiers.

She sat down on the side of the bed and put the tray next to her.

‘Is Mummy mad?’ Clementine asked, sitting up carefully so as not to upset her dinner.

Aunt Violet shook her head. ‘No, your mother’s having a lie down. She’s worked like a Trojan today. Pertwhistle has taken over now, thank heavens. Honestly, I wish that Popov party would popov out of here.’

Clementine could only agree.

‘How was your fashion parade?’ Clementine asked. Her grandmother looked even more glamorous than usual in a peacock blue silk shirt with bell sleeves and a smart pair of tapered black trousers.

‘Very successful. We raised a lot of money, which is all you hope for at these things,’ the woman said. ‘How are you feeling? Digby said you were upset – that Niki had done something else to make a mess?’

Clementine nodded, but she didn’t want to tell Aunt Violet exactly what had gone wrong.

Maybe she still had time to go and fix things herself.

'Why don't you eat your eggs and then we'll watch some telly in the library? Will's already down there having his supper on his lap,' Violet suggested, leaning in and giving Clementine a hug.

'Will Uncle Digby come too?' the child asked.

'No,' Aunt Violet said and Clementine could see a tear forming in the corner of her eye. The woman hastily brushed it away.

'He's looking after the Popov's for dinner,' Aunt Violet said.

'Shouldn't you help him?' Clementine asked. 'You're a team.'

'Maybe not so much anymore, sweetheart. You see, I thought he wanted certain things and it turns out I was wrong – kidding myself yet again,' the woman said, her voice breaking and tears welling.

Clementine hated seeing grown-ups cry. It was worse than kids. They cried all the

time – a scrape, a cross word, a lost toy – but grown-ups only cried when their hearts hurt so badly they couldn't keep their sadness inside any longer. Clementine's heart hurt too, seeing her grandmother so upset.

'He still loves you,' Clementine said, and gave the woman an extra squeeze.

'We'll see,' Aunt Violet said. She blew her nose and wiped away the tears. 'Hurry up now – you don't want to miss Ethel's television appearance.'

Clementine frowned.

'You haven't forgotten Ethel won the Great Village Bake Off and now she's promoting her new cookbook with the Loveberrys, have you? She had to wait until the term break to go on tour, but she's making her big television debut tonight, being interviewed on Atticus Strong's talk show.'

Clementine's eyes widened. So that's why Mrs Bottomley hadn't answered her phone this afternoon. It would be fun to see her old Kindergarten teacher on the television

but at this rate, Clementine was never going to collect her presents in time for the baby.



THE SCREAMER

Clementine, Will and Aunt Violet had barely recognised Ethel Bottomley on the television. Gone were her brown suit, stockings and shoes, replaced by black trousers and a buttercup yellow blouse that Aunt Violet commented did nothing for the woman's complexion. Ethel's helmet of curls had been tamed into a much more modern style than usual and she also wore a full face of makeup. Clementine thought she looked lovely.

The most surprising thing was the way Mrs Bottomley handled Atticus Strong and his banter. Ethel was matching him laugh for laugh. Who knew that the woman had such a terrific sense of humour? It certainly wouldn't harm her book sales. Aunt Violet suggested that Mrs Bottomley would be able to retire from teaching and stop terrorising the Kindergarten students to pursue a new career, which Clementine and Will both agreed was a wonderful idea.

It was just after nine when Violet Appleby tucked Clementine into bed. Given she'd slept through the afternoon, her grandmother hadn't minded her staying up late. The night that followed had been blissfully free of wailing toddlers.

The sun was already up when Clementine awoke and hopped out of bed. She planned to fix the painting in the nursery this morning, and then she'd get back onto organising her gifts – at least Odette was home now.

She walked down the hallway and opened the nursery door. Clementine blinked and rubbed her eyes, then turned around and walked outside again. She must still be dreaming, or maybe she was in one of those movies where a doorway transports a character somewhere altogether different from the place they were expecting. But when she went back inside she could see it was still her nursery, just not quite the way she'd left it.

'Who did this?' she whispered, her blue eyes wide.

'Hey, Clemmie,' Will said as he walked into the room and stood beside her. 'Wow!'

In contrast with yesterday's ruined paintwork and boxes of flat packed furniture, this room was like something out of a catalogue. Everything was done. Clementine's animal frieze was fixed, looking even better than before; the cot was made and covered with sheets and a quilt; there was a change table and a rocking chair in the corner; and shelves and even a wardrobe had been built.

For a moment, Clementine wondered if fairies were real, because this had happened like magic. Her mother had been resting all night, Will and Aunt Violet had been in the library with her until nine o'clock and Uncle Digby had been busy with the guests.

'This is amazing,' Will said, and Clementine could only agree.

'Mummy and Drew will get a big surprise,' the girl said.

The children were still admiring the room when a horrible scream split the air.

'What's wrong with Niki this time?' Clementine said. She and Will charged out into the hall with Lavender right behind them.

'I tell you, someone has taken it!' they heard a woman's voice screech. 'I've looked everywhere and Babbit is gone. Disappeared in a puff of smoke!'

Clementine's tummy twisted. Mrs Froggett was probably going to blame her – again.

'Please stop screaming!' Clementine ordered, but it was no use. The noise was getting louder. Then she had an idea.

Uncle Digby had said that Clementine had a rabbit just like Niki's when she was a toddler. What if she could find her old one and give it to him so he had a spare?

'Come on, Will, Lavender,' she said, charging along to the end of the hall and through the door that led to the attic stairs. She thumped up to the enormous space under the eaves with her teacup pig behind her.

'Why are we going up here?' Will asked.

'We need to find something, and fast,' the child said.

Meanwhile, Uncle Digby had pulled out the vacuum, hoping that the loud hum would drown out Niki's wailing. He was almost to the end of the upstairs hall when he realised that the attic door was open.

Digby quickly pulled it shut, turning the key in the lock. 'We don't want the little screamer getting lost up there now, do we?' he said to himself, although on second thought there was a certain appeal to the idea.



LOST AND FOUND

‘Hello, Theodore,’ Clementine said, giving the stuffed warthog who resided in the attic a pat on his prickly chin. ‘Now, where do you think I might find my old toys?’

Lavender rubbed herself against Theodore’s leg. Clementine wondered if she knew they were from the same animal family.

‘What are we looking for?’ Will asked.

Clementine explained about her rabbit.

Will nodded. Finding the whining kid a spare wasn't the worst idea.

'But there's so much stuff,' Will said glancing about at the weird and wonderful household cast offs, as well as a pile of old sound and lighting equipment his father had only recently brought up to be stored.

'It was way worse before the village hall burned down and Tilda, and Teddy, and Mintie and I had a big clean up. We sold lots of things to raise money for the rebuild, but then we lost Flash up here and that was a disaster,' Clementine explained.

'But you found him again,' Will said. 'So we'll find your old rabbit too.'

The attic space ran the length and breadth of the house, with tiny windows facing the front and back gardens. Clementine and Will began searching through the cupboards at the northern end. They found lots of interesting distractions, including a whole wardrobe full of hats Clementine couldn't remember having seen before.

‘Do you think Uncle Digby and Aunt Violet have really split up?’ Will asked after a while.

Two deep frown lines appeared at the top of Clementine’s nose. ‘I hope not, but I’m worried.’

‘Me too,’ Will said. ‘Aunt Violet’s much less cranky when she’s in love.’

Clementine could only agree.

The pair opened cupboards high and low, pushing a little stool around so they could get into some of the difficult spaces while Lavender settled down next to Theodore for a snooze.

‘I don’t think it’s here,’ Will said.

Clementine was about to agree when she spotted a basket wedged behind an old exercise bike and a small chest of drawers.

‘Come and help me with this,’ the girl instructed. Together they hefted and heaved and pushed and pulled until they finally dragged the basket through the gap and into the middle of the floor.

Clementine picked up a three dimensional plastic toy covered with various holes. The idea was that you had to push the right shape through the right gap to get the shape to the inside.

‘I remember this,’ Will said. ‘I had one when I was little. It’s very educational. We should clean it up and give it to the baby.’

‘But they won’t be able to use it yet,’ Clementine said sarcastically, remembering what Will had told her about her gifts. ‘It’s *way* too hard.’

Will grinned. ‘True, but that doesn’t matter, does it?’

Clementine smiled at him while Will dug his way to the bottom of the basket.

‘Is this your rabbit?’ the boy held the creature aloft.

‘Yes!’ Clementine exclaimed. Uncle Digby was right. Her rabbit was almost exactly the same as Niki’s – even down to needing a wash – but it would be perfect for the toddler.

‘Let’s go and give it to the little monster,’ Clementine said.

She trotted down the stairs with Will and Lavender behind her. Clementine turned the handle to the attic door, but it wouldn't budge.

'It must be stuck,' Will said and tried himself.

The children pushed and kicked and yelled and shouted, but no one came. They could still hear Niki screaming even louder somewhere downstairs. There was no chance of anyone hearing them above that ruckus.

'Maybe there's someone outside in the garden,' Will said.

The pair dashed back up the stairs and ran to the windows overlooking the front lawn. The children tried their best to open one so they could yell out, but every window was stuck fast.

Will ran to the other side of the attic and peered down into the backyard. The windows there were jammed too, but he could see part of a person out of the corner of the glass.

'Clemmie, come here – quick!' the boy yelled.

Clementine charged to her brother's side.

‘Who’s that with Niki’s Babbit?’ the boy said. The lid of the garbage bin lifted up and an arm dropped the toy inside. Will and Clementine strained, but they couldn’t see enough of the figure to tell who’d done it.

‘Someone stole Babbit and put him in the bin!’ Clementine cried. ‘And it wasn’t me.’

‘It definitely wasn’t,’ Will could hardly believe his eyes. ‘But who would do that?’

Clementine thought for a minute. It had to be one of the guests. Aunt Violet wouldn’t touch the tatty old thing, and Uncle Digby had no reason to throw him out, either. No one wanted to deal with Niki’s noise.

‘Someone’s leaving,’ Will said, listening to the sound of a car engine out the front. He and Clementine ran back to the other side of the attic in time to see Mr Popov’s car driving away. Clementine balled her fists. She was determined to know the truth by the time the family returned.

‘Let’s try the door again – maybe someone will hear us now that Niki has stopped

making all that ruckus,' Will suggested. The boy turned to leave when Clementine saw Mrs Mogg's car arrive. The woman pulled up out the front and took a huge box out of the boot. Clementine pounded on the windows, but Mrs Mogg didn't notice a thing.

'It's no use,' Will said, and the pair tore back down the stairs and banged on the door again.

'Help!' Clementine shouted.

'Let us out of here!' Will hollered.

Lavender grunted and snorted too.

'Granny! Uncle Digby! Mummy!' The children were bellowing for ages.

They were just about to give up when they heard footsteps outside and the key turn in the lock.

'Godfathers, what are you two doing in there?' Aunt Violet sniffed as Clementine stumbled out into her arms. Lavender took off down the hall, clearly not keen to be stuck again.

‘Someone put Babbit in the bin,’ Clementine prattled.

‘We saw them from the attic,’ Will gasped.

Violet Appleby looked at the bunny dangling from Clementine’s hand.

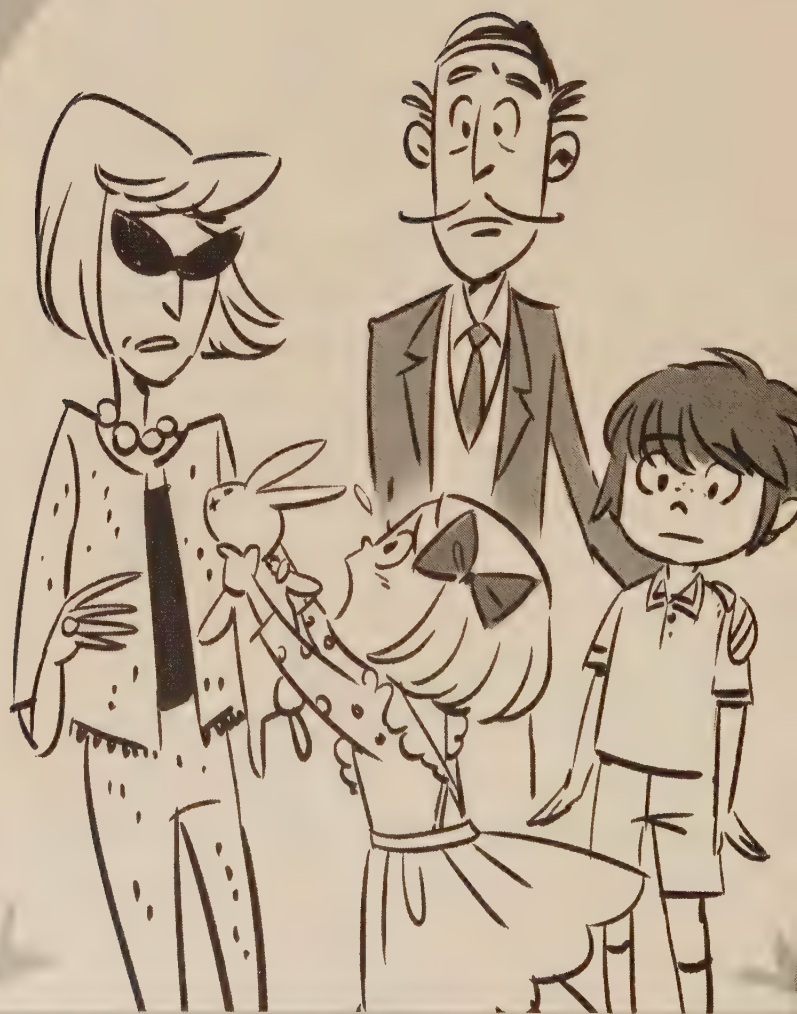
‘Are you sure about that?’ the woman asked. ‘You appear to be holding him, if I’m not mistaken.’

‘No, Granny, this is my rabbit. Uncle Digby said that I had one almost the same, except I stopped loving him when I started loving Lavender instead. I wanted to find it so that Niki would have a spare, but then Will saw someone – a grown-up – throw Babbit in the bin.’

Digby Pertwhistle arrived on the scene. ‘Oh, you found him, Clemmie.’

The child nodded. ‘But we got locked in the attic.’

Digby made a face. ‘Sorry, I think that might have been me.’



‘That’s okay. Granny saved us,’ Clementine said, then regaled Uncle Digby with the same tale she’d just told her grandmother.

‘Dear me, that does sound curious,’ Digby said. ‘And speaking of mysteries, Clemmie, could I have a word please?’

Clementine swallowed hard. A word usually meant trouble. She looked at Will, who grimaced.

‘I’ll be downstairs if anyone needs me,’ Violet said, eager to avoid the confrontation.

‘Me too,’ Will nodded.

The pair departed, leaving Clementine and Uncle Digby alone.

The child bit her lip. She hopped from one leg to the other and twisted her fingers together. ‘It was me. I did it,’ she confessed.

Uncle Digby frowned. ‘What are you talking about, Clementine?’

‘I made the messes in the sitting room the other day. I didn’t want you to leave and I thought if you had more jobs to do,

you wouldn't have time to go and look at cottages, but then you did anyway,' Clementine blurted. Tears welled in the girl's eyes.

'Oh, sweetheart,' he knelt down and drew her into his arms. 'I knew that was you – Niki can hardly reach the paintings to send them askew. You needn't worry – I'm not planning to go anywhere, even if your grandmother isn't in love with me anymore.'

Clementine stepped back. 'But what about the cottage?'

'I was just going to check on Crabtree Cottage in the village. Drew has new tenants coming in and your mother wanted me to make sure that it was spotless for them,' the man smiled.

'But you were packing,' Clementine said.

'Unpacking. I hadn't got around to finishing it as we were so busy,' the man said.

Clementine blinked back tears and hugged him tightly. 'That's the best news ever. But what was the thing you wanted to ask me about then?'

'You didn't see a little black jewel box when you delivered my shirts the other day?' he asked.

Clementine was about to say no, but decided it probably wasn't a good idea to tell any more fibs.

She nodded. 'I saw it in your suitcase but I put it back. I didn't even have a peek inside.'

Digby frowned. 'That's strange. I unpacked the case and I can't find it. It's rather special and important.'

'I can come and help you look,' Clementine offered, when there was a terrible scream from downstairs. And this time it wasn't Niki.



BABY ON THE WAY

‘Mummy!’ Clementine shouted, and took off, bounding down the back stairs two at a time with Uncle Digby right behind her. Clarissa was doubled over on the kitchen bench with Mrs Mogg and Aunt Violet beside her. A puddle was on the floor; Will had just returned from the pantry with a mop.

‘We have some broken waters,’ Mrs Mogg said.

Clementine had no idea what that meant.

‘Mummy, are you all right? Is the baby coming?’ she asked, feeling excited and a little scared at the same time.

Clarissa managed a grimace and a nod. ‘Yes, darling, it’s on its way.’

‘Right – action stations,’ Aunt Violet said. ‘Margaret, you and Will get Clarissa upstairs to bed, and I’ll call the ambulance. Digby, you get the towels.’

The old man nodded.

‘And hot water – jugs of hot water,’ Aunt Violet ordered.

‘What for?’ Uncle Digby asked.

‘I have no idea, but they always get hot water in the movies,’ the woman barked.

Clarissa’s face contorted and she let out a scream that filled Clementine with fear.

‘Upstairs, now,’ Aunt Violet directed. ‘I’ll call Dr Everingham too.’

Clementine stood on the spot, not knowing what she should do. What about Drew? He should be here.

Not a minute later, Aunt Violet slammed the telephone down, muttering about ambulances

being miles away when you needed them, then picked it straight up again to dial Dr Everingham. Gaining confirmation that the man would be there as soon as possible, she bounded away upstairs, leaving Clementine shell-shocked and all alone.

When the doorbell rang, Clementine raced out, hoping that it was the doctor, but she found Mrs Tribble and Joshua standing on the stoop instead.

‘Hello, Clemmie,’ the woman said. ‘I’ve brought that thing we arranged. I’m terribly pleased with how it’s turned out.’

Clementine’s eyes widened. ‘The blanket for the carriage and hair bows! Thank you, that’s perfect. Mummy’s having the baby right now.’

The woman gasped. ‘Is she at the hospital?’

Clementine shook her head. ‘The ambulance can’t come. Dr Everingham is on his way, but Granny doesn’t think the baby will wait that long.’

‘Perhaps I can help,’ the woman said. ‘Before I had Joshua I was a midwife.’ Mrs Tribble dumped the parcel she was holding in her son’s arms and charged into the house, leaving the children alone.

Clementine looked at the boy. ‘You can come in – but don’t touch anything and don’t do anything mean to me. I’m about to become a big sister, which is the most exciting thing ever, and I won’t let you ruin it!’

Joshua seemed taken aback by Clementine’s tone.

‘Have you got any cake?’ the boy asked.

Clementine nodded, glad to have something to do. She wasn’t keen to be upstairs with all that screaming.

She’d just cut the boy a huge slice of sponge when the doorbell went again. This time it was Mrs Bottomley. Clementine was surprised to see her.

‘I thought you were still on your book thing,’ Clementine said.

‘I arrived home this morning and had to go and see Mrs Mogg, so I thought I’d drop this off for you,’ the woman pressed a parcel into Clementine’s hands. ‘It’s that special recipe book and miniature cooking utensils for the baby.’

Clementine smiled. ‘Thank you. Granny and Will and I watched your interview last night. You were really funny and you looked lovely – much better than usual.’

Unfortunately, today the woman was back in her favourite browns.

Ethel Bottomley rolled her eyes. ‘Thank you for your high praise, Clementine. Is your grandmother home?’ the woman asked, curling her lip.

But Clementine didn’t have to explain as Clarissa let out a scream to rival anything of Niki’s.

Ethel Bottomley flew up the stairs to join the increasingly large group of helpers in her mother’s bedroom.



NEW BEGINNINGS

The crowd was growing downstairs too. Clementine didn't know what was going on. Everyone on her list was arriving with their gifts.

Will had been pacing up and down the hall outside Clarissa's bedroom and was glad when Aunt Violet shooed him back downstairs.

'Why is everyone coming now?' Clementine asked her brother, who had a strange grin on his lips. 'Did you do this?'

‘I might have called a few people,’ the boy admitted.

‘But you said my presents were stupid,’ Clementine frowned.

‘They’re not stupid. I was mean. You’re the most thoughtful big sister in the world and I’m really sorry for what I said.’ Will shrugged.

Clementine’s smile was huge. She grabbed Will into a bear hug and and kissed his cheek. ‘I love you, Will.’

‘Okay, that’s enough,’ Will protested with a laugh, pushing her away.

Ana brought the ballet shoes and tutu Clementine had asked for, and then Mr Smee dropped in with miniature soccer posts and a tiny ball – who knew where he managed to find that. Mr Mogg even popped round with a skipping rope that was so small it looked like Lavender could use it.

Clementine was amassing quite the treasure trove in the sitting room, and quite the audience to admire it, since no one wanted to leave once they’d arrived. She put Joshua

to work serving cake while Ana insisted on making tea and Will set about organising all the gifts.

The doorbell rang again, and this time Clementine was happy to see Dr Everingham with his black bag. She took him upstairs, glad to be away from everyone for a minute. As Clementine was about to return to their guests, she spotted Uncle Digby's door ajar. Remembering her promise to help the man find the little black jewel box, she scurried inside to search.

Clementine got down on her hands and knees and felt under the bed and the chair before reaching between the chair cushions. She stretched her arm into the space and *voilà!*

'Thank goodness.' She pulled out the little black box and couldn't resist having a quick look. Clementine opened it and gasped. Inside were three rings: a sparkling diamond and two plain bands. There was a piece of paper too, neatly folded. Clementine took it out and carefully read the words.

‘Clemmie!’ Will called. ‘Where are you? Do you know where I can find some more teabags?’

‘I’m in here,’ Clementine shouted back and her brother opened the door.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked, then noticed the box in her hand. ‘What’s that?’

Clementine showed him the rings and the note. ‘It’s Uncle Digby’s wedding vows. He was going to ask Granny to marry him.’

‘No way. She’s been so mad at him,’ Will said. ‘Why would he want to marry her?’

Clementine’s face fell. ‘It’s my fault that Granny has been in such a bad mood. I told Uncle Digby she didn’t want to get married, because that’s what she said when I told her I wanted to be a flower girl again, and so he never proposed.’

‘Wow! Do you think that’s why she’s so upset?’ Will asked.

Clementine nodded. ‘You said that sometimes grown-ups say things they don’t mean. That must be what happened on their holiday. But we can fix it!’

She stashed the ring box into the pocket of her pinafore just as another scream rang out. This time, though, it wasn't coming from her mother's room. The Popovs were back. Clementine had almost forgotten about the bunny in the bin until now.

'We need to do something else first,' she told Will, and his eyes went wide at the reminder.

The pair raced down the back stairs and out into the garden, where Clementine picked the grotty rabbit out of the rubbish bin. Then she snatched up her own bunny from the kitchen table and met the hotel guests in the hallway. Will was right behind her – just in case she needed back up. Clementine held up Niki's lost Babbit, keeping her own toy hidden behind her.

'I knew she had it!' Mrs Froggett snapped.

Niki's face lit up and he reached for the dirty thing.

'No!' Nikolai Popov said crossly. 'It's filthy. It's been . . . ' he stopped in his tracks.

‘In the bin,’ Clementine said sternly. ‘It was you who put it there wasn’t it? Will and I saw you.’

The man’s face fell.

‘I was in the attic looking for my old rabbit, so Niki could have a spare one in case he lost Babbit again,’ Clementine said, bringing the other bunny out from behind her back. ‘Here,’ she passed it to the boy, whose smile grew twice as wide.

‘Father, how could you?’ Katie demanded, eyeballing the old man.

‘It worked when you were little, and you had that awful blankie you carried everywhere,’ the man said. ‘But perhaps it was a bit too soon. I’m sorry, it was unkind,’ the man said.

Katie Froggett looked at Clementine, shame faced. ‘I can’t believe that I accused you – a child.’

Clementine shrugged. Her baby brother or sister was about to arrive and she had more important things to worry about. ‘It’s okay.

You fixed the nursery so I didn't get into trouble.'

The woman looked confused. 'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'But you're an interior designer, and someone fixed the painting, and built the cot and everything else last night,' Clementine said, confused. Mr Froggett stood in the background with a curious smile.

'It was you!' Will said, pointing.

'Guilty as charged,' the man said. 'But I had help from your Uncle Digby. When Niki went missing yesterday, I noticed he had paint on his hands, even though someone had done her best to wipe it off.' Mr Froggett glanced at his wife. 'I didn't want you getting into trouble for something our son was responsible for.'

Clementine was about to reply when the front door flew open and Drew charged in with Basil right behind him.

'Where is she?' he puffed.

Clementine pointed to the stairs just as her mother let out the loudest scream yet. Everyone jumped. Drew raced away.

‘Hello,’ another voice called.

Clementine spun around. The house was busier than the village hall when they had held the Bake-Off auditions. There in front of her stood Father Bob, pulling the little carriage he’d promised. It had a harness out the front that Clementine planned to attach to Lavender so they could take the baby for walks around the garden.

‘Have I missed something?’ the man asked, craning his neck to see the assembled crowd in the sitting room.

Clementine gasped. She and Will looked at one another. ‘Father Bob – you need to come with us!’

She took hold of the man’s hand and pulled him up the stairs with Will right behind them. Uncle Digby was standing outside her mother and Drew’s closed door. Clarissa screamed and roared one last time. There was a short

silence and then the sweetest sound in the world filled the house. The cries of a newborn baby.

‘It’s here!’ Clementine said. She turned to Will and hugged her brother tightly.

The door opened and Drew poked his head outside.

‘We have a baby girl!’ he beamed. ‘What are you two waiting for?’

Clementine took Father Bob’s hand as the man protested that he should probably stay outside. ‘No, I have something you need to do,’ the child said, reaching into her pocket.

Inside the bedroom was the whole family plus Dr Everingham, Mrs Mogg, Mrs Tribble and Father Bob. Clarissa’s face was red but Clementine couldn’t ever remember her looking so happy.

‘Do you want to see your little sister?’ Clarissa asked.

Clementine and Will approached the bed and stared at the pink baby, who was wrapped in a cream blanket.

'She's all wrinkly,' Will said, touching her forehead.

'She's perfect,' Clementine said. 'I love you so much, little sister. And Uncle Digby loves you, Granny.' She turned to face the pair.

'Clemmie, this is not the time,' the woman batted her hand.

'Yes it is,' Clementine pulled the ring box from her pocket. 'Uncle Digby was going to ask you to marry him on your holiday until I said that you didn't want to get married again. It was all my fault.'

Aunt Violet stared at the man in surprise. 'Is that true, Pertwhistle?'

The old man was nodding, a strange expression on his face.

'So Father Bob can marry you right now,' Clementine said, passing Uncle Digby the box.

'What? Here?' Aunt Violet said. 'We're not even properly dressed. And I haven't agreed to anything.'

Uncle Digby grinned and got down on bended knee. 'Will you marry me, Violet Appleby?'

The woman's eyes filled with tears. 'Really, Pertwhistle ...' There was a long pause. Everyone else gulped. 'I thought you'd never ask.'

A cheer went up around the room.

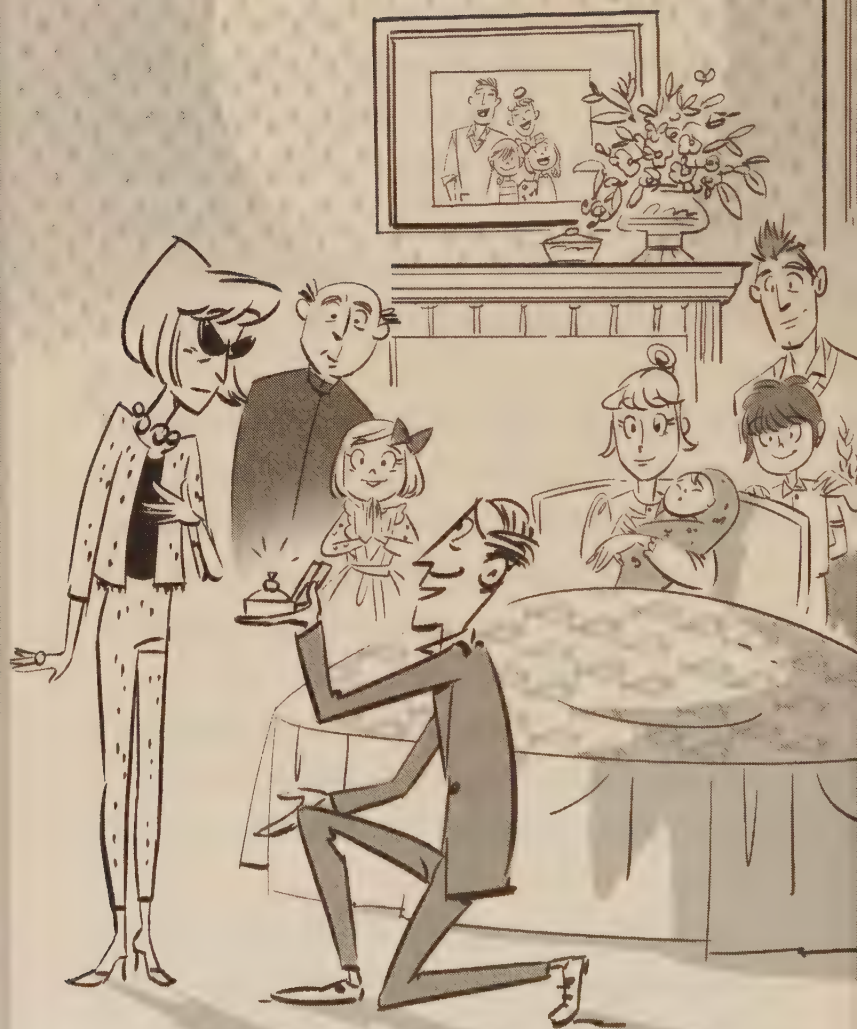
The pair hugged tightly and kissed on the lips.

'I have an idea,' Clarissa said, cradling the newborn. 'Why don't we schedule the wedding outside in the garden in an hour. I hear there's quite a crowd downstairs who would no doubt love to be part of it. And we have plenty of food.'

There were laughs and grins all around.

'Perfect, that's just perfect!' a voice rang out in the background. 'If anyone can pull this off, it will be me!'

Everyone wondered where Sebastian Smote had come from. The man immediately brightened the room, as always, dressed as



he was in an aqua suit with a pink shirt and yellow bow tie. 'I brought that present you were after, Clemmie – just what every baby needs, their own unicorn rocker – and I'm sorry for being so blunt on the phone. My bride had just cancelled her order for fifty bowls of goldfish and now I'm stuck with them! Honestly, I don't know why people want live fish as decorations at their weddings – it's ridiculous. Never again!'

Everyone laughed, though Clementine was thinking maybe she and Will could take two of the fish for themselves.

'Let's leave the family on their own, shall we?' Father Bob shuffled everyone outside.

'Mummy, what's the baby's name?' Clementine asked, standing on her tip toes beside the bed, her eyes focused on her little sister.

Clarissa smiled at Drew. 'Do you have any good ideas, Clemmie?'

Clementine tapped her chin. 'I've been thinking about it a lot. What about Clara,

because that's sort of like your name, Mummy, and it goes with Clemmie too, and Grace, after Granny, because that's what I used to call her when I talked to her painting on the wall in the stairs before I knew her name was Violet.'

'Clara Grace,' Clarissa and Drew said together.

'That is quite lovely,' Aunt Violet said, holding Digby's hand tightly.

The baby gurgled. 'I think your sister likes it too,' Drew said. Clarissa nodded.

Clementine leaned in closer. 'Welcome to the world, Clara Grace Barnsley. I hope you're ready to be busy. We're going to play soccer, and do ballet, and take Lavender for walks, and skip, and cook and everything else you can think of – oh, and I'll teach you some poems as well.'

Will chuckled and gave his sister a wink.

'Steady on, Clemmie,' Drew said. 'She's just a baby.'

Clementine kissed Clara's forehead and turned to her family. 'I don't mind. She's going to be my little sister forever and you know, we've got all the time in the world.'

Our Baby

by Clementine Rose Appleby

Pink and wriggly
Squishy and soft,
Our baby loves milk and snuggles.
Chubby and kicking
Sleepy and quiet,
Our baby loves bath time and cuddles.
Giggles and gurgles
Chuckles and chortles,
Our baby loves crawling and mischief.
Running and playing
Chasing and squealing,
Our baby loves all of us.

CLEMENTINE'S
PRESENTS

Mrs Mogg – baby-sized soccer clothes

Mr Mogg – tiny skipping rope

Father Bob – carriage for Lavender to pull
the baby around in

Mrs Tribble – blanket for the carriage and
hair bows

Mrs Bottomley – special recipe book and
miniature cooking utensils

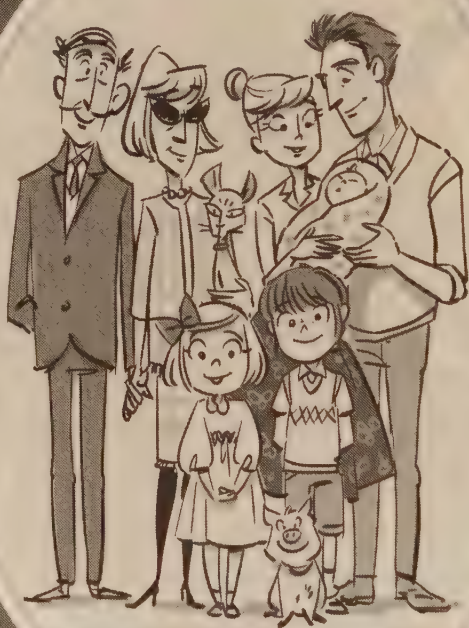
Mr Smee – miniature soccer posts and ball

Pierre – tiny baking set

Odette – plush pig just like Lavender

Ana – baby-sized ballet shoes and tutu

Sebastian Smote – unicorn rocker





CAST OF CHARACTERS

The Appleby household

Clementine Rose Appleby	Seven-year-old daughter of Lady Clarissa
Lavender	Clementine's teacup pig
Lady Clarissa Appleby	Clementine's mother and owner of Penberthy House
Digby Pertwhistle	Butler at Penberthy House
Aunt Violet Appleby	Clementine's grandmother
Pharaoh	Aunt Violet's beloved sphinx cat

Drew Barnsley	Clarissa's husband
Will Barnsley	Drew's son
Clara Grace Barnsley	Clementine's baby sister

Friends and village folk

Basil Hobbs	Documentary filmmaker and neighbour
Ana Hobbs (nee Barkov)	Former prima ballerina and neighbour
Pierre Rousseau	Owner of Pierre's Patisserie in Highton Mill
Odette Rousseau	Sophie's mother
Sophie Rousseau	Clementine's best friend
Jules Rousseau	Nine-year-old brother of Sophie
Father Bob	Village minister
Margaret Mogg	Owner of the Penberthy Floss village shop
Clyde Mogg	Margaret Mogg's husband
Joshua Tribble	Clementine's classmate
Mrs Tribble	Joshua's mother

Mr Roderick Smee	Year One teacher
Sebastian Smote	Wedding planner
Ethel Bottomley	Kindergarten teacher at Ellery Prep
Dr Everingham	Doctor

Others

Nikolai Popov; Katie, Matthew and Niki Froggett	Guests at Penberthy House Hotel
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacqueline Harvey taught for many years in girls' boarding schools. She is the author of the bestselling Alice-Miranda, Clementine Rose and Kensy and Max series, and was awarded Honour Book in the 2006 Australian CBC Awards for her picture book *The Sound of the Sea*. She now writes full-time and is working on more Alice-Miranda and Kensy and Max adventures, and some exciting new projects too.

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Jacqueline Harvey is a passionate educator who enjoys sharing her love of reading and writing with children and adults alike. She is an ambassador for Dymocks Children's Charities and Room to Read. Find out more at dcc.gofundraise.com.au and roomtoread.org.



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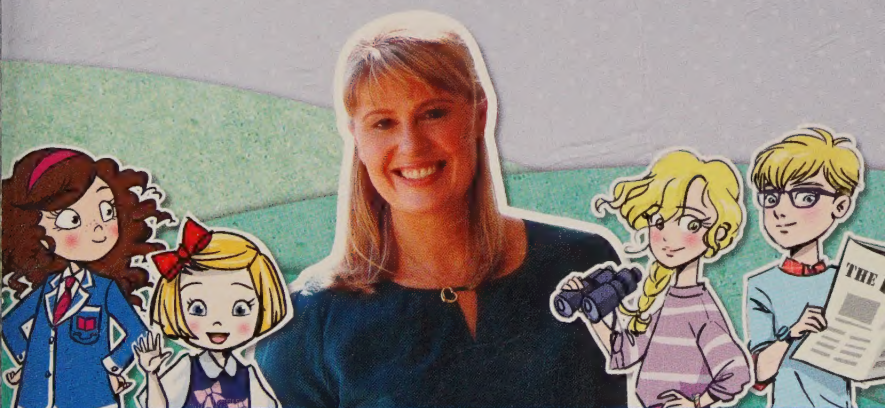
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CLEMENTINE ROSE

will soon have a new brother or sister – she can't wait! But not everything is ready for the baby and no one seems to care as much as Clementine. Not to worry, she's taken matters into her own hands.

As the due date gets closer, things at the hotel just get busier. Aunt Violet and Uncle Digby are quarrelling and the guests are causing problems – especially Niki, the troublesome toddler. Can Clementine really do everything by herself? Or will there be chaos for the baby's arrival?



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